

CLAIR DE  
LUNE.  
ANTHONY PRYDE

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**CLAIR DE LUNE**



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# Clair De Lune <sup>#</sup>

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By ANTHONY PRYDE

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AUTHOR OF

"Marqueray's Duel," "Nightfall," "Jenny Essenden,"  
"The Purple Pearl," etc.



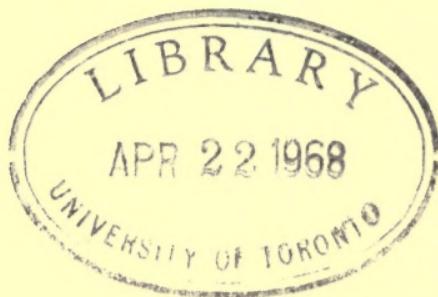
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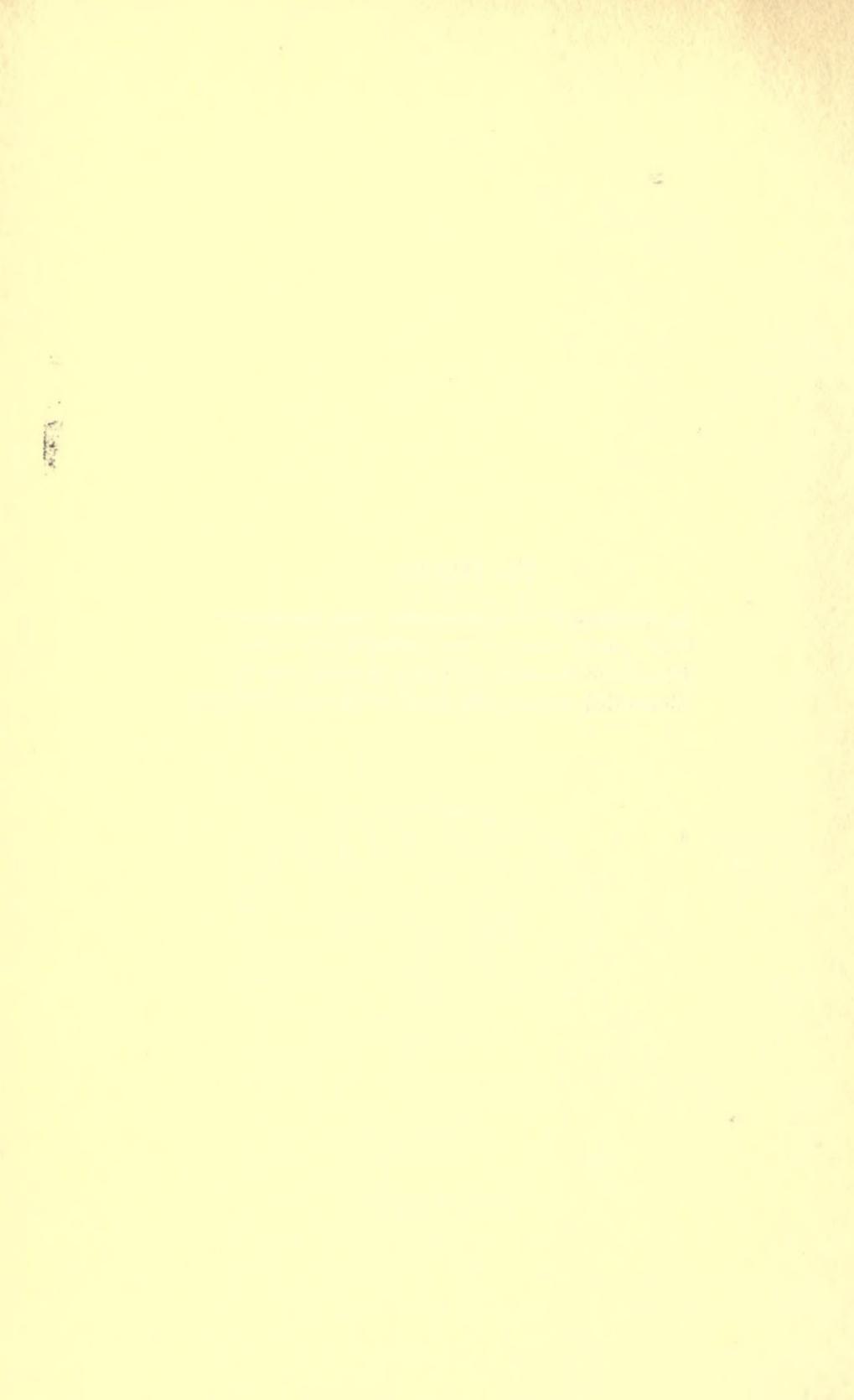
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### To HELEN

In memory of the memories that we share—  
Wide sunny rooms; the cuckoo's April call;  
The silver Darenth rippling through its fair  
Enamelled meads; the scent of flowers that fall.



# **CLAIR DE LUNE**



# CLAIR DE LUNE

## CHAPTER I

WAS Mr. Evelyn at home? No, Mr. Efelyn was not at home. Was he likely to be in before long? It was impossible to say. Was he often late? He was occasionally a little late. Where had he gone? Mr. Efelyn was playing at the Queen's Hall: had not Mr. Dent seen the posters? it had been verra extensifely advertised; carriages were ordered for ten minutes to elefen, but, as Mr. Dent would be aware, Mr Efelyn was often obliged to give a great many Encores. And would probably go on somewhere to supper afterwards? Mr. Dent would surely remember that Mr Efelyn nefer took supper after an efening concert. . . . "Oh! well, I'll wait for him," said George Dent, a trifle impatient under Fraser's coldly Highland grey eyes, which seemed to be always thanking heaven that he was not ignorant as Lowlanders are or even as this Southron; and dropping into an armchair Dent ended the interview by picking up a newspaper, which however he hastily threw down again as soon as Fraser's back was turned—the *Musical Times* was not what he preferred to read.

Dent was thickset and sandy-coloured, keeping room for temperate judgments behind a broad forehead, while his shrewd glance examined the world

and the men and women in it with the cool slow humour of the Cambridgeshire fens. Only the long upperlip and slightly undershot chin bespoke a few obstinate prepossessions and reserves, and perhaps, behind all else, a hard fighting temper, born of the drop or two of Norse blood that in an Eastern county not infrequently crosses the milder Saxon strain. He had had a long day and a longer night before it, the racket of London tired him, and as a rule he went to bed at ten, but he had come to Hever Street to find Charles Evelyn, and he meant to do it before going back to his hotel if he had to wait all night.

In the meanwhile he lit a pipe and examined Evelyn's room, which he had never seen before, and which struck him, in the given order of impressions, as very pretty, rather spendthrift, not a bit his style, and—last of all, and with a faint uprising of discomfort—too much like a woman's drawingroom and the wrong sort of woman at that! There was nothing effeminate about the chair he was sitting in, a man's chair, deep and shabby—and with shoulders well squared against its leather cushions he settled himself lower in it and stretched out his long legs in the luxury of an indulged yawn; the fire too was a man's fire, stacked high with a mixture of coal and logs, fir-tree bavins apparently to judge by their blue twinkling flames and resinous odour: roaring away on a wide and flat brick hearth, the glorious heat of them struck right across to the door. Nor had he any fault to find with the polished floor and Persian rugs, or the wide airy walls washed over with chrome-coloured distemper. Even the grand piano might pass, and the violin flung

on top of it, and the case of clarinets, the harp, the litter of music printed and in manuscript: it was an extraordinary thing that a man who might have been a country gentleman like his fathers before him should take up with the career of a professional musician, but after all Evelyn was—had been—only a younger son, and at all events, so long as he worked at his job, it kept him out of mischief. But the pictures!

Dent had pictures at home, a collection of signed engravings and proofs before letters which when the harvest was bad he occasionally threatened to sell, though he would as soon have sold his right hand—for they belonged to the house, and the house was part of himself. But those were scenes worth looking at—“The Lawn,” “The Covert Side,” “First Check,” and so on, “Harry Hieover on ‘Tilter,’ ” Wilkie’s “Penny Wedding,” Richard Herring’s “Black Rabbit”, an epitome of farm and sporting life, every stroke distinct in pale blue and green and scarlet, or dimness of sepia shadow. The works that Evelyn hung on his walls—one and no more to each wall—were neither dim nor distinct: bizarre combinations of coloured angles, which looked to Dent like the dreams of a house-painter gone mad. He couldn’t make out the subjects, and after scrutinising them for some time from a distance with his light eyes, wrinkled at the corners by much gazing across field and fallow under a bronzing sun, he was not sorry for it: for the least confusing of the five threatened to resolve into one of those pink and white café studies which, in Dent’s private opinion, decent people neither paint nor purchase.

And it wasn't the pictures only, but the curtains and cushions, the metal work and lacquer and china: the room was like a curio-shop, for every table (and there were too many tables) was strewn with objects of value: to inherit them was well enough (Dent had inherited not a few of his own), but as for taking the trouble to collect them—! And in any case they should be set out with discrimination and reserve. Dent did not mentally use the phrase "economy of effect" when he found an ivory-hilted Persian sword niched into the spout of a bronze Pyrenean regalada, but this was the instinct that prompted him to discontent. And then the photographs! men and women of every class and age, standing about framed or unframed here there and everywhere: and signed, many of them, with names well known in more than one London world. . . . Apparently Charles Evelyn was liked by people of all sorts, but especially by women—and such pretty women too!

And Evelyn's own portrait amid the débris: how like him to possess his own portrait! Dent got up out of his chair to examine it. He had not seen the original for a twelvemonth, and was anxious to learn whether the racket of this London life had altered him. A painting, but of a different school from those that graced the walls, it stood propped up unframed on a French cabinet, between a plaster cast of a woman's head which Dent thought the most hideously death-like object he had ever seen, and an ivory fan through whose sticks some one had twisted a couple of half fresh, half fading pink rosebuds. Dent carried the likeness to the lamp and studied it attentively. Come, there was no want of economy here at all events!

the head and throat only, in oils, and isolated by some craftsman's trick on a background of indigo blue: and smiling Dent owned to himself that Evelyn had not altered after all, it was the same Evelyn as he had known all his life, rather melancholy and delicate and inaccessible, with the haunting grey eyes under the waved cedar-brown hair, and the musician's pointed chin. . . .

" . . . and wait till Charles turns up, shall we?"

" . . . your cloak, Sophy?"

Dent laid down the portrait as the confused murmur of voices preluded the entrance of these other friends of Charles Evelyn: a big fair man, exquisitely dressed, Mayfair from head to heel, accompanied by a tall girl in black and white flounces and a gold-embroidered coat. "Meredith!" Dent exclaimed. He had known Meredith years ago at the university in what seemed like a different life, and his first idea was that "Sophy" was either Mrs. or Miss Meredith, but he altered his mind when her escort, with a vague provisional smile for the unexpected meeting, put her into a chair by the fire without the offer of an introduction. Brother and sister they certainly were not: nor husband and wife, for she wore no ring. Dent then, though unwillingly, entered her in a different pigeon-hole. In Cambridgeshire, in the society to which he was accustomed, girls did not visit men of Evelyn's years in their own rooms at any time, and least of all after ten o'clock at night. Yet there was a want of sentiment in the atmosphere which seemed to rule Meredith out of the field.

"Dent—is it Dent? what ages since I've seen you! Are you waiting for Evelyn? He'll be in directly;

I got sick of hanging about Queen's Hall in the rain and came on in a taxi. How long are you in town for?"

"The night. I'm only here on business. You're living in London, ain't you?"

"Well, I have a flat in Mount Street, which I inhabit for three months out of the twelve. But I'm an outrageous globe-trotter. I cut the Diplomatic because it was such a bore to be tied. What are you doing? the last I heard, you were farming your ancestral acres somewhere in the Midlands."

"So I am still," said Dent drily. "Near Temple Evelyn. Eve and I are country neighbours, as you may remember, which is why I've kept up with him. We don't as a rule see anything of each other except when he's at home. Working farmers like me don't get many holidays." He was aware of a tinge of the unduly defiant in his manner, but Meredith always had irritated him and always would do so, with his faultless clothes and faultless voice and the little studied air of self-depreciation which seemed to say "Do let me set you at your ease." Still Dent was thoroughly goodhumoured, and, since he really was quite at his ease, his spurt of irritation ended in a slow apologetic laugh. "Very jolly to see you again, Edmund," it had been Edmund and George at Cambridge, and Dent, suddenly feeling warm towards the companion of his lost youth, went back to the old terms without much caring whether Meredith were pleased or no. "You look as though the world had been treating you pretty well. But then you always did, so that's nothing new."

"And Miss Dent, how is she?"

"My sister? Oh ah! I remember, you met her in town. Very fit, thanks. Very busy just at present with an ailing Alderney calf. She runs the dairy and the poultry yard."

"And she's not engaged yet?" Dent's eyes widened in surprise. "A thousand pardons, my dear fellow, but there were moths enough round the candle!"

"I dare say—I don't pretend to keep count of Kitty's dancing partners," Dent answered placidly. How little change fifteen years make in a man's manner! The shade of impertinence was as characteristic of the Meredith he remembered as the shade of affection put on to cover it. "By the by, how soon do you expect Evelyn? The fact is—"

Dent's explanation, which would have explained nothing, was lost as the door opened again and the room was flooded with fresh visitors all talking at once. A middle-aged plump man badly dressed in light brown tweeds and a flannel shirt; an extremely handsome youth in evening clothes, as dark-haired and olive-skinned as an Italian; and a third who might have been any age, brown as a gipsy, thin as a lath, and frankly disreputable in a wet macintosh worn over a Leander blazer: Dent backed away from all of them, rather liking their looks, but apprehensive of a life so unlike his own. So these were Evelyn's London friends, were they? They might have been worse—yes, in view of the Futurist paintings they might have been very much worse! Yet they made Dent feel shy because they all knew one another so well and were so far more at home in Hever Street than he would ever be. But the wave poured in, it closed over

Meredith and his companion and over Dent as well: Meredith was not expansive, but the others were incapable of leaving a stranger in the cold.

"That you, Meredith? . . . I say, Sophy, what an auriferous coat! . . . Good show wasn't it?" Then discovering Dent in his corner, "Are you waiting for Eve? Do come over to the fire," the elder man made him hospitably welcome while the Leander blazer pulled up a chair and patted the seat of it as if Dent had been a timid dog. "He won't be long now. We often drop in to cheer him up after a Queen's Hall night, he gets the blues if he's left to recover from it by himself." Dent said "Thanks very much, sir," feeling stiff and shy and yet attracted, and the Leander blazer, who had taken off his macintosh and was sitting cross-legged on the rug, looked up with a lazy twinkle in his brown eyes.

"What'll you have to drink? We're all having coffee. You will too? That's so harmonious. Selwyn, my son, you're young and active in the legs, cut downstairs and tell Fraser coffee for six."

"You can't go ordering Fraser about like that," said Meredith angrily, "on my word, Wright, you seem to forget that this is Evelyn's flat!"

"Selwyn!"

"Y-yes?" from the stairs.

"Five coffees, one gin and bitters."

"Nothing of the sort! Do you hear, Selwyn? I won't have anything at all. I must say, if anyone did that in my house—"

"Cheer up. No one would do it in your house. Amateurs are safe. But Eve is a freeman of the Republic of Art, to which in my humble way I also

belong—the beautiful communion of one faith, one hope, one toothbrush—anathema in all ages to you of the unthinking *bourgeoisie*—”

Dent perceived that Meredith was making himself ridiculous: perceived too that the Leander blazer had salted his chaff with truth. Meredith was distinguished from the other men, even young Selwyn in his slim black and white, by the want of some quality they had in common: what was it? perhaps a common outlook, the direct simplicity of men who keep in their pockets a private standard of values. And observant and reflective, though enveloped in good will, Dent sat and listened to their conversation, from which an impression of Evelyn gradually disengaged itself, familiar though elusive.

“Shut up, you two, you’re always sparring,” came the goodhumoured voice of the elder man. “You might shift over a bit, Wright, and let the rest of us see the fire. Rotten weather I call it for the beginning of September! But wasn’t the Hall packed? Bless ’em, they’d come to hear old Eve play if it rained cats and dogs. Paris, Rome, Munich, Zürich —there’s not one of ’em all so reliable as good old London. We don’t know much about music, but our heart’s in the right place.”

“Were you looking at Eve’s portrait?” this was young Selwyn returning, a little out of breath. He came up with his engaging smile and stammer and took it out of Dent’s hand. “L-like him isn’t it? How long is it since you’ve seen him? Oh, a t-twelvemonth! But Eve never alters. Oh!” in a voice suddenly raised and shrill with indignation, “good God don’t put your nose in it! It isn’t meant to be s-smelt!”

"Am I looking at it too close? I don't know anything about Art," Dent said humbly. He looked round at the black and gold cloak with some vague idea of drawing her into the conversation, but instantly felt his mistake, just as he had felt the absurdity of addressing the older man as "sir"; if she remained silent it was from preference; she could have come in whenever she liked. He fell back on the safer subject of the portrait, which young Selwyn was holding out at arm's length with an expression half pleased and half dissatisfied. "I'm sure it's uncommonly clever."

"Y-yes it is," agreed the boy gravely. "It's Eve all over, he so often looks as though if you t-touched him he wouldn't be there. I've never done anything better." Dent looked up in surprise. "Oh, you didn't know? That was r-rather a shame, to ask you how you liked it without telling you it was mine. But fellows often do seem to know me." He paused a moment and then added "S-somehow," in a deprecating voice.

"Ah, but I don't know anyone," said Dent, smiling at him. "I'm a country cousin. I only turn up in town once a twelvemonth to go to an Agricultural Show. It must be a good ten years since I've been to the Academy."

"Better introduce ourselves, shall we?" said the elder man. "The young 'un is Selwyn Yarborough." Dent opened his eyes; even he, though his views were bounded by Burlington House, had heard of Selwyn Yarborough, Tennant's favourite pupil, and so a spiritual grandson of Carolus Duran, whose work at twenty-two had been hung on the line at the Autumn Salon. "And Wright and I are *Messenger* men." Now the

*Messenger* was the illustrated paper that Dent read over his breakfast table every Friday morning. "I'm Hurst—Cecil Hurst—and Wright does rotten sketches to illustrate my rotten stories." Another shock to Dent's preconceptions; but for the sparkle of sagacity and courage in the light-blue dangerous eye, this hard-bitten fighting journalist might have passed for a prosperous grocer.

"And I'm only George Dent, and a hopeless duffer," Dent said smiling, "though I've seen or heard of all your things. I wish I weren't such an outsider. Oh! wait a bit, though, I'm indispensable after all—I'm the admiring public!"

"Well, and what about me?" the girl in the black and gold coat raised her voice for the first time. "Haven't any of you got enough manners to introduce me to Mr Dent?"

Hurst turned round and smiled at her, a good kind smile that touched his face with beauty. But no one was ready with a reply, and there was time for Dent to feel distressed again and uncomfortable, before he became aware that Evelyn himself was in the room, appearing from nowhere with his usual belated grace, and smiling down at Sophy with whimsical yet melancholy eyes.

"You're the star to all our wandering barks," he said in his pleasant voice, naturally soft, but the softer for a tone of affection which struck strangely on Dent's bewildered ear. "The rest of us play tricks on platforms, George is the fat public in the stalls, and you fling the laurel when we earn it: and that's all the introduction you deserve."

Dent would have liked to send the unseasonable guests packing. But they were in no hurry, and after all his errand could wait. The room was soon blue with smoke and Sophy accepted a cigar from Evelyn. By degrees Dent gathered that the pianist, fresh home from a brilliant visit to Paris, had given that evening a more than usually brilliant performance and had been encored again and again by a Queen's Hall audience full in spite of the wet weather: there was talk of other men and comparison of other triumphs. But there was no sign of elation in him, he was still the same quiet easy-going Charles Evelyn as in old days, and Dent, who had been feeling irritated, soon found himself falling afresh under the old charm; he never had been able to be angry with Evelyn and was not now. And by and by he began to wonder whether this disability were not common to the rest of the room, even Meredith in his detachment, even the still anonymous Sophy: they were all very proud of him, it was evident, and though they were not all fond of one another, young Yarborough being much inclined to fall out with Meredith, and Meredith with the imperturbable Wright, for Evelyn their feeling seemed to range between willing and unwilling love.

Hurst said "Play us the Alkan again," and without affectation Evelyn sat down at once to the piano and began to play, keeping his wrists low with little movement of the shoulders: "Alkan's *Le Vent, The Wind*," as he explained to Dent, whose French was of the furthest end of Norfolk. And very queer music Dent thought it, and (privately) much like that mythopœic tune that the old cow died of. A run of infinitesimal

unstressed notes flying up and down the treble octaves, separate notes no longer but indistinguishably mingled like the wail of a violin: a lull and break of sun and blue sky: the roar of a gale rising to thunder in a spinney of fir trees: and then again the run and ripple and cold ceaseless crying of wind on a thymy moor. . . .

"Not so bad," said Hurst frowning, as Evelyn let his hands lie on the keys, prolonging the last faint vibrations which were just not silence, and then were silence. "But I don't hold with programme-music all the same. And what business have you to make the piano do the job of a violin—eh, Sophy? Tell me that, young Evelyn."

"But that's what the B. P. like," said Wright. "Nobody wants to hear a penny whistle. But all London would go miles to hear a chap who could make a trombone sound like a penny whistle."

"Oh you be quiet!" said Evelyn, getting up from the piano. "I've got to master my tools, haven't I?"

"And earn a living like the rest of us," put in Meredith from before the mirror in which he was calmly examining the sit of his coat.

"Like the rest of us!" Wright pointed a derisive finger. "Now then, lily of the field!"

"We are not all so innocent as you are, my dear Wright," said Meredith with the neatly genial smile which so often gave to his acidities a delusive aspect of compliment. "This flat is extremely comfortable, and I don't suppose Evelyn could pay the rent of it out of his unearned income. For my part, if I were he, I had rather play *Pomp and Circumstance* into a gramophone than retire to a garret in Bloomsbury."

"Ah! but there speaks the gross soul of the unthinking *bourgeoisie*—"

Dent perceived that Meredith did not, no, he really did not like that joke about the *bourgeoisie*.

"I don't care a button for any one of the lot of you," said Evelyn pettishly. "I only want to be let alone. I do hate being worried!" He brought both hands down on the keys again in a crash of chords which made Selwyn jump, but he was not allowed to proceed, for before a dozen bars were over Fraser hurried in—Fraser, once defined by Leslie Wright as "one of those faithful servants whose service is perfect freedom."

"Mr Efelyn will remember that he promised not to make a noise after elefen o'clock!"

"Oh bother!" said Evelyn piteously. "I forgot the people downstairs. Oh Fraser, I haven't done it for ever so long! They ought to be able to stand a little noise now and then?"

"That iss fery well, but it iss not six months since we were turned out of our last flat, and it iss not easy to find rooms that will suit us." He shut the piano: Dent was only surprised that he did not lock it. "And it iss not true to say it wass only a little noise. It wass a fery great deal."

It was impossible not to feel abashed as Fraser withdrew, dignified, and casting a reproachful glance on Sophy, who had been seized by irrepressible laughter. But Evelyn, though he joined in the universal ensuing merriment, continued to look a little harassed, as though the world were too much for him. He flung himself anyhow into a chair by Dent, his legs over one arm of it and his hands clasped behind his

rumpled head. "You can't imagine, George, what a nuisance it is having to live in town! One o' these days I shall make hay of my rooms and take off all my clothes and go to Central Africa—where there won't be any people downstairs!" he finished with a ferocity which quite startled Dent, to whom the provocation seemed inadequate. A little out of his depth, Dent suggested the soothing influence of complimentary tickets. "No good," Evelyn shook his head. "The Hippodrome's their fancy."

"Poor wretches," said Selwyn, genuinely compassionate. "One ought to feel s-sorry for them. How aw-awful it would be to be like that!" Lying back in his chair before the fire, he stretched himself on his cushions with a little shiver of distaste and flung out one hand to Sophy as if for consolation: and as she leant forward smiling at him, her coat slipping from her shoulders, their youthful slenderness and satin texture gleaming under the transparent black gauze of her dress, again Dent found himself wondering who she was and what had brought her to Hever Street. He thought her not exactly pretty, but attractive; her eyes were thoughtful, her lips sensitive, and the young figure flowering out of her open bodice was grace itself. Too graceful for Dent: and too free in its grace.

"There now," her roving fingers brushed across Selwyn's lashes, "look what you've done!"

"Never?" said Evelyn, diverted. But it was true, there were tears in Selwyn's eyes. "Well, you're what I call an audience worth playing to! Now what's the matter?" Selwyn had sprung to his feet, abashed and glowing. "Don't blush, young 'un—not but

what that sunset shade is rather becoming to you—”

“Do shut up!” said Selwyn crossly. He wandered away and stood with his back to the room. “C-catch me crying over anything you ever play again!” This time Evelyn’s freakish malice widened suddenly into a broad grin.

“Bet you an even tenner you can’t hold out through half a dozen *Songs Without Words!*”

“Peace, Faun,” said Hurst with his paternal kindness, “don’t meddle with the bloom.”

“Hurst’s right, you are a bit of a Faun, you know,” said Sophy. She got up and leant over the back of Evelyn’s chair, winding her arm round his neck and gazing down at him with an infinity of tender and uncritical sweetness. Dent did not know where to look, but no one else seemed to feel any surprise. “We all love you better than you love us. But ‘tisn’t fair to tease the baby-boy. Besides, it’s dangerous, Selwyn’s pretty safe to get his own back—”

“Hallo!” Selwyn in all innocence was in the act of doing so. “Eve, you’ve got a new photograph! Oh, how v-very pretty! I should like to paint her. Would she let me? I would paint her for nothing. Is she a l-lady?”

“Put it down, old fellow,” said Hurst gently.

“Here, you let me see!” said Sophy. She took the photograph out of Selwyn’s hand.

Dent glanced at Evelyn: an Evelyn less serene than usual and less competent to control the situation. He looked as though he would have liked to regain possession, if he could have done so without giving the incident an unwelcome significance. Among so many portraits Dent had not noticed this one, could not

see it from his chair by the fire, and was not interested in it, except that on general principles he felt a vague reluctance, perhaps in sympathy with Evelyn, to leave it for Sophy to comment on: but, though indifferent to the portrait, he could not, for reasons of his own, remain indifferent to Evelyn's connection with it or with Sophy.

"I wish she weren't a l-lady," lamented Selwyn. "I do want to paint her!"

"What do you want her for," said Sophy, "a figure model?"

Hurst glanced at Dent out of the tail of his eye and was not surprised to find that the country squire—Hurst's rapid summing up of him—was growing restless. And Evelyn, who should have intervened, was standing with his back to the fire, sipping an innocuous French *sirop* and apparently paying no attention to Selwyn or Sophy either. Then Sophy turned to Meredith: "Isn't this a pretty woman, Meredith—?"

Meredith was perfectly willing to look at the photograph, but before he had time to do so Hurst got up and took it out of Sophy's fingers. He bent them over so that the pictured face was turned down out of his sight, but Sophy tried to turn it up again and between them they let it drop. It fell near Dent's chair. The country squire uttered a slight exclamation, then, as Hurst stooped to pick it up, forestalled him with an extremely quick and quiet movement and slipped it into his own pocket.

"It is my sister," he explained.

"O Lord!" said Sophy.

Hurst straightened himself rather stiffly. "I beg your pardon, sir. I was going to put it back on the

shelf." He glanced at Evelyn. But Evelyn was still drinking his *sirop* and looking at no one. "Selwyn is painting-mad," Hurst continued gravely. "Hey, Selwyn? He never meant any harm in his life. No one minds what he says."

"I certainly don't," said Dent smiling.

Hurst shrugged his shoulders and turned away, pulling Sophy's hand through his arm. "I guess it's time we all went to bed. It's after one o'clock and Evelyn's tired—you were looking fagged on the platform, Eve: 'stands to reason it must take it out of you, if it were only the physical effort and the strain on the memory. Come along, Sophy, my dear, Eve's had enough of us."

"Right you are, *bonpapa*," said Sophy carelessly: "good night boys—good night, Charles."

Meredith brought her coat, and Hurst with his deft strong hand, as pink and plump as a baby's, gathered up her handkerchief and programme and gloves, and Sophy went meekly with him to the door. But on the threshold she turned, and then it seemed to Dent that he saw her thoroughly alive for the first time—a strong little face, innocent yet reckless, with what he termed to himself Old Nick's own smile on her lips and in her eyes.

"Say, Mr. Dent, is your sister as nice as you are? Nicer? And so pretty too? My! I don't call that fair. But 'tisn't any good, he's a non-starter." A jerk of the silken head indicated Evelyn. "Oh bless you, yes, I know him—better than he knows himself. He wouldn't give *that* for any one of the lot of us, not if it was Venus of Troy and Mrs. Beeton rolled into one!"

## CHAPTER II

WHEN all the guests had departed—Meredith the last to go—Evelyn stretched himself with a frank yawn and gave a sigh of relief. Then coming back to the fire he caught Dent by both hands and stood before him swinging his arms to and fro. “My dear old chap, I am so glad to see you! Rather a bore having all that gang in just when I was wanting to talk to you. But none of them would clear out because none of them would want us to clear out if they were in our shoes, except Meredith, and he wouldn’t care. All the same I’m glad you saw them. Didn’t you like Hurst? Interesting chap, Hurst: he’s been all over the world, he and Wright, opposites and inseparables—they haven’t a thing in common except goodness of heart. Sit down now,” he pushed Dent back into his chair, “and have another pipe. Why didn’t you let me know you were coming down? And can you let me have a tip for the Leger?”

Dent had not come to Hever Street to discuss the St. Leger prospects. But his business though important was not exactly pressing, and having waited so long it might as well wait a little longer. He leant back in his chair and examined Evelyn, on one knee before the fire, his clear pale face faintly reddened by its glow.

“I didn’t know you had this photograph of Kitty.”

“She only sent it me a few days ago. Very like her, isn’t it? I never meant to leave it on my table, but

I liked looking at it and then I forgot. I'll put it away now in a safer place." He stretched out his hand for it—carelessly, to all appearance. But Dent continued to hold it on his knee, looking at it as if it had been the portrait of a stranger—always a difficult criterion for a brother, but less so for Dent than usual because this portrait had in it a quality of the universal which makes some faces the property of the world and not only of their own families. It represented Kitty Dent seated before a piano, her head thrown back, her lips apart, her fingers leaning on the keys: apparently she had just finished singing and was turning round while the last faint vibrations floated away. She wore a light dress, open at the throat, and crossed in close, soft, Romney folds over her bosom: and an immense round hat of fine straw, no trimming on it but a scarf, which made a slightly tilted frame for her small face and liquid eyes. The impression left by the absence of shading was one of clear fairness and unusually delicate grain.

"Very like," said Dent. He ignored Evelyn's hand and slipped the photograph again into his pocket.

"That's mine, you know," said Evelyn, getting up to warm the backs of his legs at the fire. "By Jove it is a cold night for this end of September! The wind's Arctic. It's mine, George: and I want it."

"You should take better care of it then."

"Well, so I will in future." Evelyn gave his sweet-tempered equable laugh. "But you can't have it. It was given me for keeps. There's an inscription."

Dent had read the inscription: "With Kitty's love." He was wondering whether that girl in the black and gold coat had read it too. He sat back in his chair

and squared his shoulders, looking up at Evelyn with a smile equally sweet-tempered and equally resolute. "Kitty didn't bargain for such a lot of admiration."

"Marry come up—is that because of Selwyn Yarborough? Oh, you don't understand. No one minds Selwyn. In point of fact if he did paint Kitty it would be a tremendous honour, he's all the vogue just now and could paint peers and judges and Society beauties all day long if he chose, but he won't touch sitters unless he likes the look of them—says he's out for character as well as clothes, which naturally narrows the field a good deal! He goes about with his head in a bag and cares for nothing on earth but his art. . . ." But it was plain that George Dent was thoroughly indifferent to Selwyn's art. "Oh, George, you *don't* understand!" said Evelyn laughing. "Well, how shall I placate you? Can't you see how fond we all are of him? except Meredith, and that's one up for Selwyn: it's his innocence that annoys Meredith—he calls it affectation because he can't bring himself to believe that a young fellow of Selwyn's age can have a mind so like a girl."

"I don't know that I did object to young Yarborough—much."

"What then—Hurst?"

"A very good sort, I'm sure."

"My own carelessness?"

"Not exactly a novelty, Eve."

"But you were peevish."

Dent took his pipe from his mouth to knock out the ashes and put it back again.

"Sophy," said Evelyn after a short silence, "lives in the flat above mine and is a great friend of us all."

"So it appears," said Dent placidly. "By the by, no one ever told me her name. It's awkward sometimes, not knowing what to call a woman when you're talking to her. Miss Carter? Thanks. I wondered, when she came in, whether she was Meredith's sister or his wife or what. They came in together."

"He got to know her when she was a model in Paris."

"Really? I don't know much about models but I always fancied they were recruited from a different class."

"Is this inquisition meant for Sophy or for me?"

"Oh, you, you, entirely you," Dent hastened to assure him with a friendly wave of his pipe. "Needless to say, Miss Carter's goings on, I mean her way of settling her life, aren't the remotest concern of mine. But as you're supposed, at some distant and uncertain date, to be going to marry my sister, if neither of you changes what you call your mind in the interval, I must own, Eve, I couldn't quite make Miss Sophy out."

"The passion for making people out," said Evelyn, sitting down again and beginning to take off his boots, "is strong in the bucolic mind. Where on earth are my slippers? And what earthly business is it of yours to try to make poor Sophy out? How would you like it if a fellow that had never seen her but once in his life set to work to make Kitty out?" Dent was galvanised into indignation, but though he sat up with his mouth open he was not given any chance to remonstrate. "Oh my Lord, Caesar's wife!" As usual, Evelyn's melancholy scorn put all disagreement firmly in the wrong. It never made Dent budge one

inch from his original position, but he felt safer so long as he did not argue. "What! isn't poor Sophy good enough to be mentioned in the same breath?" Evelyn demanded. He had found his slippers inside the coal scuttle, and putting them on he turned sideways in his chair towards Dent, one long slim leg thrown over the other, one hand propping his chin. "Why can't you ask for your facts instead of nosing round like a dog behind a dustbin? Sophy isn't Meredith's ladylove. And she isn't Selwyn's either: he hasn't one and never has had. Nor is she mine, which is what you really want to know, isn't it? She was a figure model in Tennant's studio. Her father was an English submarine officer, and her mother was a French waitress in a cracker-and-tinsel teashop on the quay at Rouen, name of Chartier. It wasn't a misalliance because it wasn't a marriage at all, but she was a beautiful woman and it was a serious tie, what you call mutually exclusive. As long as he was alive he kept her in a villa at Fontainebleau where he used to spend his leaves, can't you imagine it? but he was drowned in a collision at manœuvres, and though his relations offered to take Sophy Madame Chartier stuck to her child and her independence. Then she died too and Sophy was in very low water for a time. That was when Tennant got hold of her. Eventually one of the English aunts left her a bit of money, and she chucked studio work and turned over a new leaf. Since then she has been highly respectable and I believe rather dull: that is an accident to which respectability is liable."

"Thank you: I feel it."

"Any further information I can offer you?"

"None," said Dent smiling at him. "And I beg your pardon. But I'm rather out of my depth, you see. I don't know much about painters or musicians except that they generally seem to lead rather queer lives. Oh yes, there is one thing more, which you might tell me if, as I suppose, it's common knowledge in all your set. Did you say there never was anything between her and Meredith?"

Evelyn raised his eyebrows. "I understood you to say you weren't interested in Sophy personally?"

"No more I am: but I felt sorry for her. It's a sad little face."

"I have no idea," said Evelyn shortly.

"I see," said Dent, dismissing the subject with a nod.

He put his pipe in his pocket and drew in his legs, turning squarely towards Evelyn as if he were bracing himself to a delayed and disagreeable duty.

"Well, Eve, it's very good of you to have put up with such a catechism. But London hasn't altered you, you're just the same old Eve you used to be when we played cricket in the field behind the house. In those days you didn't often answer questions and never asked any, and you haven't done it now. Weren't you surprised at my turning up in your rooms without warning at ten o'clock at night? No? Well, I suppose midnight and mid-day are all one to you. But they ain't to me, I like my regular hours. I shouldn't have come round so late, in fact I shouldn't have come down to town at all at this time of year, if I hadn't had an uncommonly serious reason."

"Serious?"

"Yes, I've got a bit of bad news for you."

"Not Kitty ill?" said Evelyn, half rising.

"No: I shouldn't have left her if she were. No, it's bad news for you alone. Sit down, old man." He threw his arm round Evelyn's neck. "It's about Philip. No, not ill. Worse than that. Dead."

"Dead! *Philip?*"

"M'm."

"But—how awfully sudden!" said Evelyn. Dent felt him shivering. He kept his arm over Evelyn's shoulders and said no more till the difficult, self-contained, but nervous nature got its poise back: then rose and leant his elbow on the mantelpiece, standing with his back to Evelyn and the other hand thrust deep into his pocket. "But I had a letter from him two days ago!" said Evelyn in a dazed voice. "Are you—of course you are sure. Was it—was it an accident?"

"Yes, and a bad one."

"Oh . . . go on."

"He was out riding on a young mare, schooling her about the lanes, and they came suddenly on a motor lorry. You recollect the railway arch up by Green's Farm? It was round that sharp corner where the road's narrow. There was a train going by overhead, and apparently he was coaxing the mare along and never heard the lorry till it was on top of him. Then the double fright was too much for her, and she backed up against the wall, crossed her legs and fell with him. The men on the lorry couldn't stop it in time. He was badly crushed. No, not his head: the off fore wheel went over his loins. They got a gate off its hinges, put him on it and carried him home. He lived about six hours, just breathing."

"When—?"

"Yesterday, between seven and eight in the evening; too late to wire to you. The first we heard of it was Cotton coming round to ask me to go up at once. I was out, but Kitty flew across—"

"Kitty did?"

"Of course she did. She was alone with the servants and doctor from eight o'clock till close on ten. It was a good job, because Philip was conscious enough then to talk to her from time to time. When I saw him, speech was gone. But there was no pain."

"Why wasn't I sent for sooner?"

"There are no trains in the middle of the night, old fellow, and I couldn't come off the first thing this morning because it was cattle-market day and I'd arranged to meet a Cumberland man who was only in Cambridge between trains. We might have got through on the telephone, but it'd have been too late in any case. We all knew that from the first."

"So you determined to wait till you could break the news in person and soften the shock? That's like you," said Evelyn with a shade of ambiguity in his manner. "Well, I won't deny it is something of a shock. Were you there when he died?"

"Yes: it was difficult to tell when he did die. One minute he was breathing and the next he wasn't, that was about all."

"Not disfigured?"

"Hardly. A bit of a mark on his face, I think the mare's hoof must have touched him as he fell: but it's impossible to get anything like a straightforward account out of the men on the lorry. They don't seem to have taken in what was happening till—till it was over."

"But his body. . .?"

"Well. . . ."

"No pain? His back was broken, I suppose. What happened to the mare?"

"She had to be shot. Do you really want to know all these details, Eve? Don't they only make you sick?"

"I don't know what I want to do. I believe I want to cry, like Selwyn," said Evelyn. He dropped his face on his hand, but only for a moment. "That's no good, I couldn't if I tried. I say, George, old man, this is a rotten business. I wish I hadn't had such a lot of rows with Philip. I wasn't a bit fond of him, you know! Or was I?" He looked wistfully up into Dent's kind, distressed eyes. "I've never done anything but have rows with Philip from earliest infancy when they couldn't even put us in the same perambulator, but then I never thought of his going and dying before I did. Let me see, how old am I? Twenty-eight—then Philip was only twenty-nine. There were barely eleven months between us."

"I fancy if you had been further apart you would have got on better. There were faults on both sides, Eve, don't you go blaming yourself unduly. I was awfully fond of Philip and so was Kitty, but he never could forget he was the elder brother, and he did try to ride you on too tight a rein. I've often told him it couldn't be done on eleven months' seniority. He used to behave to you as if it were twenty years!"

"He used to tell me I was careless and extravagant: and so I was."

"Aye: you were."

"I've always lived up to my allowance and a bit

beyond it. . . yes, even now, though I've made a lot of money these last five years. But do you know what this flat stands me in?" Dent had no idea. "And I shan't tell you," said Evelyn. "You're my future brother-in-law, and I suppose now Philip's dead you'll take on his job." He leant back in his chair, his hands in his pockets, both legs stretched out before him. "The last letter I had from him was to warn me that I was overdrawn at the bank. I tore it up and chucked it into that paper basket. I dare say it's there now. Oh, this is a rotten business! It never entered my head that Philip would go before I did: his was a much better 'life' than mine. Bar accidents he'd have lived to be ninety: I shan't."

"Why do you say so? there's nothing the matter with you, is there?"

"No: but the Evelyns never make old bones. Philip wasn't a bit of an Evelyn; he was a Masson—he took after my mother's family. Do you know if he left any message for me?"

"His love."

"Oh. . . ."

"And there was more than that: but Kitty can tell you better than I can. Don't take it so to heart, Eve. There were faults on both sides: if it had been you that were killed, Philip would have had just as good cause to repent, or more." But Philip, Dent reflected, would not have wasted many minutes on repentance; when did Philip ever act on impulse, or regret an action? The narrow inflexible nature was strong where Evelyn was weak, and respected, by inevitable corollary, where Evelyn was loved; though George and Kitty Dent had loved Philip too for old sakes' sake,

because they had been brought up with him, and it was not in their conservative souls to be a man's neighbours all their lives and not his friends. But if they had loved Philip well they had loved Evelyn better. George Dent could not bear to see Evelyn unhappy. In the lifelong disagreement between the brothers, his sympathies had always gone out to Evelyn, even when his judgment occasionally sided with Philip, and he would have said so much more emphatically but for the certainty that he would only anger Evelyn. Timidly he touched Evelyn's shoulder. "Eve, there's so often trouble of this kind; pretty nearly always when death comes suddenly and there isn't time to—to make friends." Evelyn stirred impatiently, shaking off Dent's hand.

"I know all that. Don't prose, George!—and don't tell me I'm an ungrateful ruffian, because I know I am. I say, what ought I to do? Pack some clothes and go up to Temple Evelyn, I suppose; there'll be any amount of business to attend to. Besides, I want to see Philip. Oh but it is a nuisance! I don't want to leave town just now, I'm up to my eyes in work. . . . Now have I shocked you? No: you and Kitty always understand."

"Yes, old man, I think we do."

Dent strolled over to the window and flung it wide, letting in a chill breath of riverside night. Below lay a broad dark road not much frequented by traffic, and beyond it the trees of a square, their foliage, after the heat of August, already beginning to rust and fall. Away on his left the river rolled its dark waters under Chelsea Bridge and down to the sea. Through the gloom he could tell it was the river only

because here and there from its further bank a lamp was reflected along it in a ladder of yellow light, which when it reached the current was broken into a thousand stars that danced on the tops of a thousand little waves; for out of the North a strong wind was blowing, heaping up and driving before it tumultuous flights of cloud. And beyond the leafy square the forms of buildings loomed up huge and dim, the people in them all asleep, while now and again over their roofs and between their chimneys a star showed flying, winterpale in an interstice of the cloudy chase: like a star over a hill on the other side of a wood.

Like most people who love the country and cannot be happy for long out of it, Dent had known what it was to feel frightened in it. But there are night hours in London that produce as vivid an impression of hostile life and dangerous forces as any wood full of snow or fiery sunset burning itself away on the edge of a moor. Dent shivered: he was not a fanciful man, but he had had no sleep for thirty-six hours and he was not accustomed to the sight of death. How cold it was! he felt as though he were stripped to that dark wind. And how lonely! Charles Evelyn seemed far away, much nearer to him was Philip, his old friend, the flitting of whose soul he had watched barely twenty-four hours ago. When a young active man is struck down without warning and without time to wean himself from his human interests, it is difficult not to think of his spirit as lingering in the places and among the people it knew when it was alive. The rushing wind made the curtain shake and the candle shiver. What was that story of the voice that cried "Let me in"? Dent shut the window.

Strange how such childish superstitions linger in some parts of the country! Dent of course was not superstitious. . . . He drew the curtain.

For Evelyn, a townsman, night and wind were night and wind and nothing more. He leant forward to rake the fire, sending a stream of golden sparks up the chimney. "George, it was good of you to come all this way to break the news to me. Where are you staying?"

"Where I always do, at the Liverpool Street Hotel, so far as I'm staying anywhere. But I shall go back to-morrow—to-day, that is. I should like a few hours' sleep, we none of us had much last night, and I've been on the go ever since. There's an express at ten-five if you would care to travel up with me. Kitty's going to drive in and meet it. I said I should come by it if I could. She's dreadfully sorry about this business, Eve."

"Very disinterested of her, seeing that I shall come into Temple Evelyn now. Not much money, however: unless I sell the place."

"Sell it!" George Dent echoed, horrified. "You never would do that, surely?"

"I must either sell it or let it. I could never afford to live in it."

"Philip did."

"Yes, by pinching and screwing in every direction. Do you see me doing that? Philip was a Masson: I'm not. Besides, Philip hadn't any debts. I owe a devil of a lot of money. And they'll make me pay up now," Evelyn added petulantly: "they always do; directly one comes into a little property they flock round like so many old carrion crows!" He strolled

over to the piano and struck half a dozen chords, desisted and let the lid fall with a slam. "George, I do hate it all so! What on earth was Philip such an ass for? It's not as if he couldn't ride! He could sit any horse that ever went on four legs: and he had beautiful hands too—beautiful hands. Which day is the funeral?"

"We naturally left that for you to fix."

"Oh! much obliged! I'd rather fix my own. There'll be any quantity of people to interview and papers to sign and legal forms to fill up, and I hate Hanmer and Hanmer hates me. For two pins I'd go to France by the morning boat and leave no address." George Dent made no attempt to argue these futilities, the expression partly of a genuine and natural incapacity and partly of a repressed wayward grief which found no outlet except ill humour. "And there isn't a decent piano in the place, there never has been since Kitty and I upset the claret-cup into the intestines of the Erard in the library. That was Philip all over to refuse to get another one, he hated to hear me touch a note." He laughed out and ran his hand through his thick brown hair till it stood on end in a plume. "Quite so, I am eminently unreasonable and deplorably childish and all the other things that you so nobly haven't called me. I'll play up when I get to Temple Evelyn. But—it's a cruel business." He ended with an irrepressible, suffocating sob.

"M'm," said Dent, staring into the fire.

"I'll meet you, then, at Liverpool Street at ten o'clock this morning."

"Do. And try not to be late, Eve, for once; the

place is at sixes and sevens without you, and though I took a good deal on myself there were a great many orders I can't give."

"Late!" said Evelyn impatiently, "is it likely I should be late?"

## CHAPTER III

DENT thought it more than likely that Evelyn would be late: in fact so nearly certain that he cut short his own sleep, breakfasted at eight, and drove round to Chelsea to fetch him. But even these firm measures were vain, for he learnt from Fraser, stiff with a sense of grievance, that Evelyn had left the flat between four and five in the morning and had not returned. He had dragged Fraser out of bed to pack him a bag, but had given no hint of his intended movements, though when Dent began to look anxious Fraser condescended to smile. He was not anxious. Nor, on second thoughts, was George Dent; there really would have been more cause for anxiety if Evelyn had done anything so uncharacteristic as to catch a train.

Dent gave a philosophic shrug. It would have been idle to wait, and after keeping a look-out for Evelyn on the platform till the last minute he got into a third class smoking carriage and travelled up very comfortably by himself. It was barely half past eleven when he carried his suit case out of Cambridge station to a high dogcart which stood waiting in the dusty yard. The tenant of the cart was his sister, Kitty Dent. She was all in grey, from her tiny scarfed cap to her thick gauntlets and fringed suède shoes: a small lithe creature of a deceptive delicacy of aspect, supple as a wand of steel, yet decked with the freshness and bloom of a China rosebud. She smiled down at Dent

with a mild brightness of interest as he climbed into the seat beside her, leaving her the reins.

"Well, have you seen Eve?"

"Yes, last night," said Dent briefly. "He was to have travelled with me but he didn't turn up so I came on ahead. He'll probably follow by the next train."

"Did you arrange with him to travel with you?"

"I suggested it. Why not? It was the natural thing to do."

"Did you tell him I was going to meet you?"

"Did I?" The hesitation was disingenuous. "I believe so—yes."

Kitty gave a little carefree laugh. "George, didn't you know your Evelyn Charles Evelyn better than that?"

"As a matter of fact," Dent said more cheerfully, as if pleased with Kitty's way of taking the defection of her lover, "it did occur to me that he might fight shy of that arrangement. But I didn't think it would be good for him to be left alone. You were quite right, old girl, he was very much cut up—far more so than I expected. I suppose he was fond of poor Philip though one never would have known it. After all, your brother's your brother. It can't count for nothing to have been stable companions for fifteen or twenty years."

"Besides. . . ."

"She's pulling a bit, isn't she? Shall I drive?"

"Oh no, thanks. Tell me more about Eve."

"There isn't much to tell. Besides what, were you going to say?" But Kitty intimated that the end of her valuable observation had escaped her memory.

If Dent had not yet found out that Evelyn's airy manner covered a nature sensitively affectionate and dangerously amenable to pity, it was not for her to enlighten him. "He was playing at the Queen's Hall last night," Dent went on. "I've just read a notice of it in the *Telegraph*, cracking him up for a second Pachmann. But that new flat of his must run him into a lot of expense." Here it was Dent's turn to practise economy, for he did not think fit to tell Kitty that Evelyn had owned to being in debt. "Beautiful rooms they are and close to Grosvenor Road, which is a dear neighbourhood; and everything very well done —a nice old Adams chimney-piece in carved marble, and furniture to suit. Several other fellows came in with him after the concert, chiefly newspaper men, and queerlooking, some of them, but nice chaps. Oh, and Edmund Meredith was there too. It seems he's by way of being rather a pal of Eve's, but he didn't mix well with the writing and painting crowd." Dent would have been cut to pieces sooner than mention Sophy to his sister. "You recollect Meredith? he asked after you. Said he met you in town."

"Ye-es, I remember Mr. Meredith."

"He didn't want to marry you, did he?"

"I do not know, dear," said Kitty laughing. "I did not refuse him and no woman ever will. He would never commit himself unless he were sure of his ground. So you couldn't break it to Eve till after these men were gone? How—how did he take it?" She meant "Tell me what he said and the way he said it, describe him feature by feature and the clothes he wore and the chair he sat in," but she knew that

Dent could not satisfy her hunger for detail. No one ever can.

"He didn't say anything in particular. He seems to hate it all, even the prospect of coming in for Temple Evelyn," said George Dent, watching his sister's tiny wrists with admiration. "I'm sure she is pulling too hard for you, isn't she?—I thought he'd like that, but it seems only to weigh on him and depress him. He talks of selling it."

"That would be a pity."

"A pity? It would be a crying scandal! I can't understand how he could dream of such a thing! Imagine an old family place like that going to the hammer! They've been at Temple Evelyn longer than we've been at the Manor Farm. But of course he'll never do it when it comes to the point; Eve starts a lot of plans that never come to anything."

"Marrying me, for example. Did he refer to me at all?"

"Yes. I felt rather cross with him. You sent him your new photograph, didn't you, a few days ago?"

"Why—has he lost it?"

"No: but last night one of the men that were there—young Yarborough, the painter chap—found it on Eve's writing table and it was passed round for admiration. I don't mean that any of the men said anything you wouldn't have liked: and Eve apologised afterwards—said he left it out by mistake, stuck it up there and forgot about it. But they were all so free and easy that I felt rather cross with him, and I collared it and wouldn't give it back to him. Here it is. He'll probably come to you for it now."

Dent took it out of his pocket and laid it on the cushion between him and Kitty. "If he does you can give it to him if you like but I'd rather you didn't. Eve doesn't mean any harm, but he's a bit too careless."

"Rather careless, certainly, to forget about it. And it was such a pretty photograph too!" Kitty gave a burlesque sigh. "I fully expected him to sleep with it under his pillow. Eve is the most unsatisfactory lover I ever had or dreamed of having. But one can't be hard on him now." She slanted her whip, pointing sideways up the long low slope of white road and woody hill. "How would you like it, George, to come home to Temple Evelyn and find no one to welcome you but the dead?"

The mare, three parts thoroughbred out of a Newmarket stable, dropped to a walk as they breasted the last steep rise, and Dent turned in his seat to glance all round him. Cambridge, which in every direction ends abruptly like a fortified city, was already four or five miles away and indistinct under a haze of smoke in the faint red of its old brickwork and the grey of turret and spire. Elsewhere the sky was autumn-blue and flecked with a few clouds that lay on it like patches of snow on blue ice, so pale it was, and so soft they were with their light and lilac shadows. And under this opal gleam, out of the pale Cambridgeshire countryside in its water-colour tinting—silver-gilt of stubble, verdure that had been sainfoin or clover, purple-dark of fallow land—their hilltop rose up like a wave, its lift of a couple of hundred feet setting them high over the plain: carrying on its chalky crest a march of beechwoods, still

summer-coloured, and the bend of an ivied wall of black and white flint, the park wall of Temple Evelyn. The house was hidden among the trees; but here were the gates of graceful ironwork and the square stone lodge: and as the mare paused to breathe a moment, before breaking into a trot again for the long, slow descent, the chiming of a clock in the Temple Evelyn stables musically told them it was noon. Methodical Philip Evelyn had wound that clock every Monday morning: to-day was Friday: before it next needed winding, the hand whose impulse it was now fulfilling would be in the grave. Dent shivered, though the sun was hot.

Then the mare, young and fresh, darted away down-hill again, and for the next five minutes Kitty's attention was devoted to keeping her in hand, while the stone wall chequered with tads of ivy under its march of beech trees flew by at a rapid rate. The wall ended where the garden of the Manor Farm began: a low, square, white house set well back from the road across a shady lawn, the chalk downs and their beech-wood bosses rising up behind, the farm-yard and its thatched barns and honey-coloured ricks only half hidden behind an evergreen oak. They turned in at a white gate and drew up accurately within an inch of the steps, and Dent, getting down, was immediately enveloped in dogs—a flood of dogs which poured out of the hall door and fell over one another in emulous desire to lick his nose. He beat them off and turned to help his sister, taking her fingertips while Kitty came to earth with a light spring. "A little tired, ain't you, Kitty?" He kissed her cheek, a demonstration neither habitual nor rare. "You've been on the go

ever since Wednesday evening. Did you have a good night last night?"

"So-so," said Kitty smiling at him. "As good as I wanted."

"Terrible thing, poor Philip's death. I can hardly believe he's gone."

"I caught myself this morning on the brink of telling Annie to bake some more gingerbreads in case Mr. Philip came in to tea."

She went slowly indoors accompanied by her own devoted collie, the other dogs remaining with their master. When Dent turned to follow her, after lingering a moment on the steps to glance round him with the quiet satisfaction which he always felt on returning to his own roof tree, and to distribute pats at random, he noticed with a faint vexed frown that the palms of her gloves were cut to ribbons.

Charles Evelyn could not go up to Cambridge by the ten o'clock train from Liverpool Street, because he had previously caught the eight forty-five from King's Cross. While Kitty and George Dent were driving from the station, he had already reached Temple Evelyn on foot, covering four miles of dusty road with the cool unhurried stride learnt in a country boyhood. Where the long slope began to rise towards the hills, by Charles Burnage's lonely inn crouched like a grey cat under its tall sign and sheltering sycamore, he got over a gate and struck into a footpath across the fields—which were now his own, though he wondered if there would be enough money to pay Philip's death duties without selling some of the land.

The park wall was too high to be vaulted. But

here in a bend of it was the old garden gate, its key hanging on a nail which only the initiate could find. How often had Evelyn let himself out that way in his boyhood, when he was in such a rage with Philip that he could not bear to stay within earshot! Many a fit of fiery temper he had walked off along the Roman Road over the tops of the hills, where flax and scabious blossomed in the sere September grass. . . . And so across a belt of beechwood, and brushing through a young quickset hedge which Philip would have respected, into sight of the house, large, and loosely built, and dignified, if a little faded by wind and weather: a square Georgian house in stucco like the farm below, with a Georgian portico and suavely moulded bays. It gave Evelyn a shock to find the blinds drawn at every window. But of course it must be so! Temple Evelyn was dead like its master, though the garden was still so vigorously and richly alive.

How they shone, the scarlet geraniums in their stone urns on the lawn! How gay the borders were with sunflowers and hollyhocks and the late pink Caroline roses! It was exquisitely kept up, not a bent nor a dandelion on the turf nor a weed in the brilliantly patterned carpet flowerbeds; Philip had been a careful householder, and Sutton's catalogues were the one lure he never could resist. But it was not exactly habitable. It was for show. Dearer to Evelyn were the oldfashioned grounds at the back of the house with their cut-and-come-again luxuriance. Here in front, within range of the drive, the edict "Thou shalt not pick" had always been enforced with all the rigour of nursery law. As late as seventeen

he remembered to have received half a dozen stinging cuts across the palm from his mother's ruler, for being caught redhanded, or rather lilac-handed, with a bunch of heliotrope stolen for Kitty Dent.

And suddenly in the remembrance of old obligations Evelyn realised that he had no business to be coming home on foot with the dust of the road on his boots. He ought to have made a grave ceremonial entrance, driving in through the lodge gates, the sound of wheels bringing the servants out to meet him with suitably distressed expressions; and then it would have been his duty to shake hands with old Malyon the butler, and attend to his narrative of the sad fatality, leading up to a "This way, sir," and the flinging open of a locked door. . . . But he could not, no, he could not face that locked door and Philip's dead face under the ægis of old Malyon. An adept at not doing his duty, Evelyn sneaked back into the beechwood and slipped along to the library, which faced north and could not be seen from either drive or gardens. Here if anywhere he might find an open window, and this if any room in the great house was his own. He had never felt more than a guest's right in his bedroom, very large, stiffly furnished with immense pieces of mahogany furniture, and shared with Philip for the first twelve years of his life.

Yes, the library window was open, and thankfully he flung his leg over the sill and got in as he had done hundreds of times in his boyhood, when on his way back from some expedition of which his mother or Philip would not have approved. The shadow of his boyish sense of guilt and fear fell on him now. He had always disliked and dreaded scoldings, though they

had never deterred him. A caning broke no bones, but one of his mother's religious lectures would find out every tender spot in him, not because she did not understand him but because she understood him too well. Ah well! neither his mother nor Philip would ever scold him again. For Philip after their mother's death had been very nearly as bad. How well Evelyn remembered his last interview with his brother—one of those irritating, disagreeable interviews of which Temple Evelyn had seen so many! Philip had refused to increase his allowance, and they had parted, outwardly civil, inwardly exasperated, Philip raging against his extravagance, Evelyn shrugging his shoulders over Philip's nearness: and certainly Philip was near: he would spend on the upkeep of Temple Evelyn but on nothing else, and when he went about in his shabby corduroy breeches, and a tweed coat with a hole in the elbow, strangers occasionally took him for a gamekeeper. Still one had to be thick-skinned to make that mistake. All the Evelyns had looks, but Philip was the most goodlooking of two generations: taller than his brother, and dark as a Spaniard, with a princely way of bearing himself that drew men's eyes to him in great cities. And now he was dead, and had left the tradition of Temple Evelyn to Charles Evelyn's careless musicianly hands.

It was still early, and Evelyn was supposed to be coming by the later train with Dent, and theoretically could not be here for another half hour. He flung himself into a chair and shut his eyes, but he was too tired to sleep—almost too tired to know that he was tired. He had had a heavy strain the day before; never since entering on his musical career

had he confessed to feeling shy before an audience, but the truth was that he turned horribly nervous every time he had to go on a platform, and the fact that no professional pianist nowadays can afford to put up a sheet of music before him made matters worse. Not that Evelyn ever looked at the notes he was playing—still he would have liked to know they were there, even as there are many middle-aged clergymen who like to have a Prayer-Book open on the desk before they begin on “Dearly beloved brethren” or even the Lord’s Prayer. Once launched Evelyn was safe and could have played the clock round without glancing at a printed page, but every time he undertook an important engagement he had to go through twenty-four hours of preliminary anguish in the certainty that *this* time when he sat down to the piano every note he had ever played would go out of his head. Such a panic is a wearing strain. To be encored half a dozen times by a packed Queen’s Hall audience is a strain too though of a pleasanter nature, for after the flame of excitement has died down one is left feeling chilly and depressed. And then Philip’s death. . . . It was no wonder Evelyn was tired.

And giving himself up to daydreams he lost himself in sensuously vivid memories of childhood and youth, golden moments, a touch, a scent, a phrase of music, pink roses on a blue sky, the silken chill of running water, a stolen night on the grass of the Roman Road—but not of George Dent or the servants or the lawyer or the thousand and one duties that patiently awaited his attention. . . .

“Good morning, Eve, I hoped I might find you here.”

"Kitty!" exclaimed Evelyn, starting up and rubbing his eyes. Miss Dent dropped her hands on the window sill and swung herself in over it with the easy dexterity of a boy. Seen on her feet she was a small creature, her head not quite on the level of Evelyn's shoulder, though Evelyn was no more than of middle height. She had taken off her cap, and into the dark room, lined with books from ceiling to floor, her thick fine hair of a shade that Evelyn called silvergilt brought a spark or two of sunshine. She had not seen Evelyn for a twelvemonth, but without delay or confusion she came to him and held up her cheek for a kiss. Few men would have disdained this privilege. Her face and throat were milkwhite, except where they were dyed with the carnation stain of perfect health, as evenly and delicately ingrained as the pink shading in a flower petal. But Evelyn kissed her lightly and almost like a brother. "O Kitty, you're as clever as ever and ten times prettier! How on earth did you guess where I was?" Kitty gave him a fleeting smile and silently drew herself out of his light clasp. "Come and sit on my knee," said Evelyn, holding out his arms to her. But she shook her head and subsided into a chair opposite—an immense armchair with comfortably broken springs. "But, Kitty-wee, have you come up alone? Isn't George back?"

"George is back, and has gone out to see how the young pigs have got on since he went away. No, you need not apologise for throwing him over; it occurred to him afterwards that you wouldn't care to travel up with him and be met *en famille*. He was really rather glad because he doesn't like the back seat in the dogcart."

"But it wasn't that at all," said Evelyn disconcerted. "It simply was that I suddenly remembered—"

"Yes, darling, I know."

"—that I couldn't go off without seeing Dimmie. Now you see you *don't* know, and there was a real reason. I had to cut round in a taxi and it took me half an hour to get him out of bed."

"Yes, darling, there always is a real reason. This is quite a good one. Who is Dimmie?"

"Dimsdale Smith, my—my *impresario*."

"So, as you were too late to catch the ten o'clock, you caught the eight forty-five. It is a thing that might happen to anyone; except of course that very few people have an *impresario*. No, now I won't tease you any more. Dearest Eve, how tired your eyes look! But how little you've changed!—how little you ever change, considering that you've grown into a famous man since I saw you last! Yes, really: a twelvemonth ago you were in the second flight and now you're in the first. I was sorry you had to be away when I was in London, but that Continental tour did great things for you. Did you bring any luggage or any other clothes besides what you have on?" Evelyn had left his bag at the station. "We must tell Malyon to send for it. Have you seen him yet?"

"Not yet. I haven't been here long."

"Oh well, you must. And you will have to arrange about the registration and the funeral. There are a heap of things to be done." It was not for want of imagination or sympathy that Kitty Dent had set herself to reduce the tragedy of death to terms of the commonplace. "You see George and I are up in all

these tiresome practical details because it isn't so very long since Father died. There must be an inquest, Dr. Leigh says. Purely formal, of course, still you will have to see the police about it. But first you had better see Philip himself." She rose. "Come, and I'll take you to him."

"Where is he?"

"In his own room." She smiled at Evelyn, who was inclined to hang back. "Are you frightened, Eve? I'm not, and you won't be when you've seen him. Sometimes death is terrifying, but Philip only looks as if he were asleep. Still there's always a strangeness. Let's hold hands." And with her small hand, so full of life, she drew him on half against his will into the shuttered hall, where only a few pin-size rays of autumn sunshine, like burning wires, shot aslant through a green twilight: up a wide staircase under darkly blinded windows: to the door of Philip's room.

It was locked, and when Kitty unlocked it Evelyn's surprise and relief were so great that he forgot to be frightened. Philip's room faced due south. It was very large, and lit by three tall *croisée* windows, and these had all been thrown wide open on a flowery balcony. Across worn carpet and dark carved furniture a mellow glow of September sunshine came streaming in, and with it a scent of heliotrope and petunia and drifted leaves from the garden and from all the blue and brown distance of beechwood and valley. In this golden haze candles were burning, tall wax candles in tall silver candlesticks, two at the head and two at the feet of the dark carved bed; and between them Philip Evelyn lay at ease, dark and stately, a fine linen sheet drawn up to his breast, a sheaf of brown and

red and golden chrysanthemums strewn round his head and over his serenely folded hands.

"Who put the flowers and lit the candles?" Evelyn asked after a long silence.

"I did."

"Naturally. Anyone but you would have put white flowers."

"Philip wasn't a child," said Kitty. Closing the door behind her, she stole to the bedside and knelt down, and after a moment of shyness Evelyn followed her. There was not the vestige of a prayer in his mind. Capricious and even grotesque fancies flitted through it, the most persistent, and one that made his blood run cold, an idea that his brother was still breathing: he could have sworn the sculptured lips quivered, and the chest, partly uncovered, rose and fell in a faint respiration. But it was not so, and he knew it: for Philip Evelyn the end had come.

And gradually, when Kitty in her cool monotone began to murmur a Latin prayer for the dead, he felt calmer, as if soothed by being brought into communion with so many others who had suffered the same ache of pity and irremediable regret. *Locum refrigerii, lucis, et pacis.* . . . truth or fable—and by Philip Evelyn, born a Conservative and a churchman, it had never been called in question—this fellowship of prayer at least took from death the terror of its loneliness.

"Kitty," said Evelyn under his breath, "I wish I cared more. If I did I shouldn't care so much." He rose to his feet and slowly bent to touch the waxy forehead with his lips. "Poor old Phil! Rough luck, isn't it?—oh, how cold!"

"I expect you care as much as Philip would have if it had been you," said Kitty drily. She too rose from her knees, with a certain briskness of manner. "Don't let's stay any longer now, Eve. This that's left is not Philip." She lingered to draw the sheet an inch or so higher, taking care to touch the chill breast without shrinking, and then, slipping her arm into Evelyn's, made him go out of the room before her. The living are of greater importance than the dead, and Kitty Dent had not engaged herself to marry an Evelyn without coming to understand an Evelyn temperament. She breathed more freely when they were safe outside and the door was locked once more.

"Eve, I want you to make me a promise. Will you?"

"If I can."

"Not to go into Philip's room again." Evelyn started. "There's no need. I watched with him all last night—"

"You did *what*?"

"I kept watch over him. What is there in that to surprise you? Aren't we his oldest friends? George had to be away and there was no one else. I never left him from the time George went till I had to drive in to the station to meet you. Afraid! no, why should I be afraid? I never can understand that terror of death, which is the one thing that's certain to befall every one of us. I was glad to be with him; it's so quiet at night, and one can think such long thoughts and see all one's life so clearly when there are no interruptions. But, dearest, I don't want you to go in without me. I've a fancy that I should like to

have been with you the last time you saw him. Will you promise?"

"For no reason?"

"For a whim."

Evelyn thought it a strange whim. But he could not refuse her; and when night came, though it never crossed his mind that Kitty had deliberately protected him from himself, he was glad that her whim defended him from an impulse to go in and find out if Nature's inexorable law had worked any change as yet in Philip Evelyn's carven beauty.

## CHAPTER IV

“**S**O far as I can see,” Charles Evelyn was saying with his good-humoured smile a fortnight later, “when the death duties and Hanmer’s bill are paid, and when I’ve cleared off my own debts, I shall have about £300 a year to live on. I don’t see myself at thirty-five or so riding to hounds and giving notable decisions on the Bench at Quarter Sessions, but even if I were cut out for the career of a country gentleman it would be difficult to make ends meet. Philip did it. But a good slice of his money has gone to line the pockets of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. And besides I’m not Philip.”

“The last argument of the learned counsel,” said Kitty Dent, “appears to me to be conclusive.”

Attired in sympathetic mourning, a black and grey striped voile dress and the wide round hat of her picture scarfed in black, she was sitting on the turf in the rear garden of Temple Evelyn, while its master, in white flannels and a straw with a Queens’ ribbon on it, lounged at her feet. Evelyn was in no mourning at all, but his defiance of convention was tranquilly innocent. Fraser was still in London, and left to himself it did not occur to Evelyn to make any change in his dress or even wear a black band on his arm. George Dent had entreated Kitty to give him a tactful hint—“Why can’t he do as other people do?”—but Kitty had only laughed and put him by.

“What shall you do—let the place?”

"Or sell it. I shouldn't get much for it if I let it. The shooting isn't good, and the house is oldfashioned and rather inconvenient. Two bathrooms and twenty bedrooms! But a man who wanted a background might like to buy it and put it into repair. You can't deny that it has atmosphere. And they say people will pay any amount for atmosphere nowadays, especially the—the Johnnies that don't inherit it; I'd rather have fresh air myself."

"Munitions?"

"Or margarine. Not but what I'd rather keep it in our own class," Evelyn added, with a shade of unintentional arrogance which brought her familiar teasing smile to Kitty's lips. But this time the joke was mainly against herself. "Our class?" George Dent with his uncompromising stern humility had never let her forget that she was not by birth of Evelyn's class. "Far rather. And it might be done," Evelyn pursued the devious path of speculation. "There's Edmund Meredith now, he's looking out for a house within an hour or so of town: you recollect Meredith? I should rather like to do a deal with him, it's so much nicer dealing with a man you know, that you can be sure won't try to cheat you. It's an economy too, because then you aren't let in for an agent's five per cent or a pestilent lawyer's bill. Lawyers simply eat into money. Why, it costs you sixpence to stamp an agreement!"

"Whereas if you let it to Mr. Meredith you could dispense with an agreement. Oh, I see," said Kitty, reflective. "That would be a wonderful economy. All you would need would be half a sheet of note-paper, 'Dear Meredith, You can have Temple Evelyn

for £500. Ever yours, E. C. E.—P. S. But I don't want to sell the furniture.' Or would you throw the furniture in?"

"Flea!"

"Me flea? Why?"

"Because you're small and irritating. I'd throw *you* in for two pins—if I dared indulge the hope that Mere-dith would take you." He discerned a silent sparkle in Kitty's eyes. "Hallo! what's this? Kitty, you don't mean to tell me—?"

It was not Kitty's way to tell tales out of school. She turned her head to look up at the house, which smiled down at them in the misty brightness of a September morning, white and friendly in its coat of stucco, three storeys and a pillared Georgian promenade between dark belts of beechwood. All along it there stretched a flight of steps, wide and shallow, and at either end a pair of carved urns overflowed in a stream of nasturtiums, jade and brick-red and lemon-yellow, blackish-red and peach-colour, a tangle of leaf and flower from stone to stone and on over the turf. Such was Temple Evelyn in the morning sun. The other way, down the slope of the lawn they were sitting on, blue and yellow butterflies hovered against an immense wall of yew, cut into arches under which one could see the tops of an orchard gleaming with half-ripe apples. And all round, protected by shrubberies of beech and ilex and spring-coloured acacia, there were beds full of summer flowers, the sort of flowers that can be picked from one year's end to another: there was not a month, there was scarcely a day in the hardest winter when one could not find blooms in those high sheltered borders, violets in

woody walks, late rosebuds under a fending box grove, snowdrops that pricked up in January, geraniums that struggled on till December.

"It would be a pity to sell it. Do you know, Eve, you're curiously wanting in the sense of association? Most men would sooner cut off their right hands than give up a place like Temple Evelyn, and I'm not sure but what when it was too late you would be sorry yourself. Of course you can't live in it now. You have your profession, you'll be in London or on the Continent for twenty or thirty years to come. But you'll grow old one day, even you, and then you'll want to rest. Besides, a place like Temple Evelyn isn't yours alone. It belongs to those that are gone before and that will come after. You're only a link in a chain."

"Oh, my children, if I ever have any, will have to shift for themselves," said Evelyn carelessly.

Kitty, like her brother, could preserve silence. She did so in answer to this observation—which, in the circumstances, was not exactly felicitous—with the result that it lingered in the air and presently came back to Evelyn by a different avenue. He glanced sidelong at her and sat up, his arms round his knees. "Kitty, what size do you take in gloves? Twos? Or is that shoes? You haven't said good morning to me yet. You turned up when I was knee-deep in accounts and I couldn't attend to you properly, but now I can, and I suggest that you should say good morning."

"Dear Eve, the servants can see us from the windows!"

"They have seen us before. Considering that we

began it when we were in long clothes, they must be inured to envy by now." He wound his arm round her waist and touched with his lips her cheek as soft as a flower, which was all she permitted him. "Miser!" said Evelyn in her ear.

"Evelyn: if I ask you a question, will you answer it?"

"Certainly." He relapsed on the turf, stretching himself indolently at full length, one arm thrown over Kitty's knee. "The record of my past life is open to your inspection. It happens to be depressingly blameless—I do hope you won't mind!"

"It happens to be your future that interests me," said Kitty drily, "considerably more than your past. I want you to be perfectly frank, and, if you can, straightforward. No, you are not: not as a rule. You mean well, but you live in a mist and I want you to come out of it. Here's my question, and please take time over it: do you or don't you want to marry me?"

It was not what Evelyn had anticipated. He sat up again as if galvanised. "Kitty! what an extraordinarily maladroit lover I must be!"

"Evasion No. 1," said Kitty, laughing.

"Evasion—? I don't follow. Haven't we been formally engaged with bell, book, and candle for the last eighteen months, and haven't we both of us known for the last eighteen years or so that we were going to marry each other when we grew up? Even you would hardly have the impudence to throw me over at this time of day, I should hope!"

"Evasion No. 2."

"Kitty! is there any other fellow in the field?"

"I had better say it again," said Kitty with a little resigned shrug, "because by now you must have forgotten what it was. Do you—or don't you—want to marry me?"

"Of course I do!"

"I said you were to take time to think it over."

"How long should I take if you asked me whether the sun rises in the East? Of course I want you to marry me! Not that I'm half such a brilliant match as you deserve; if you knew your own value you would throw me over and stand out for a duke, or a motor char-à-bancs proprietor—I believe they're financially a sounder proposition nowadays. But I shan't offer to release you from your plighted troth. Try to cut and run, Kitty, and see how fast I'll hold you."

"Rather loose, to be candid," said Miss Dent, examining her lover with her faintly derisive smile. "I'm not jealous, and I certainly am not exacting, but it is a fact that since we parted in town last October I've written to you every week, and I've only heard back eight or ten times in reply. It doesn't signify, I don't live for your letters, but I should like to know exactly how we stand. You say we're betrothed with bell, book, and candle, but do your friends in London know you're engaged to me?"

Evelyn had not the slightest idea.

"And if I gave you a ring you would drop it when you washed your hands, or give it to a waitress for a tip next time you happened to leave your pocketbook at home. It is a most amusing experience being engaged to you, Eve. But don't apologise, we never were on sentimental terms, were we? Even when you asked me to marry you it was an extremely cool, *quid pro*

quo sort of bargain—to keep George quiet, and to keep Philip quiet, and because so far we had neither of us seen anyone we liked better. And, yes," she touched his arm with the tips of her fingers, "I do believe you would hang on to me if I tried to run. I've grown into a habit, a bit of background, like an old pipe or an old coat, and as you're a born Conservative, like Philip, it would fidget you to lose me. You would put your hand out for me and not find me and say 'Hallo, where's Kitty gone? Bother, I must have dropped her!'"

"Kitty," said Evelyn, exploding, "you are an idiot!"

"I think so too, darling," said Miss Dent sweetly. "Girls often are. But never mind, I shall pay my own bills: I'm no one's enemy but my own." Faint and far beyond beechwood and apple orchard, her eyes were fixed on the spot where the vague blue of the sky melted into a blue ring of plain. "So you propose to sell Temple Evelyn? How cross George will be! He'll implore me to use my womanly influence. Let us hope no one will buy it. Dear old place! but you never loved it as I do."

"I was not happy here," said Evelyn briefly.

He was glad to follow Kitty's fresh lead; she had been serious or half serious under her raillery, and when that happened (which was very rarely) she fretted him with a demand—no, not a demand: never was any woman less exacting: but at all events she fretted him and he winced under an indefinable strain. "It'll sell," he said. "It could soon be made habitable if one spent four or five thousand on it. And some of the New Rich would buy it for the Hunting Tower alone. It isn't every day that a genuine

fourteenth century hunting lodge comes into the market. Did you know Henry V slept there? That beats Queen Bess. Besides, he really did. George and I came across a record of it in the strongroom the other day, in Chancery hand that I couldn't read a word of, but George made out a bit of it and it turned out to be bills for the Royal party, *item* one dozen plovers and a pipe of Malmsey. Tell you what, let's go and look at it now." He sprang up in his quick vagabond way and offered a hand to Kitty. "I haven't been in since I was ten, when I swarmed up the ivy and crawled through a window. But we still have the original key, if you can call it a key—it's more like a bent skewer. Wait while I fetch it."

Kitty was inured to Evelyn's unexpected sallies. Docile, she strolled on under the clipped yew arches, down through the orchard where windfallen apples dotted the turf with yellow gleams, and up again into a slope of wood. Here the trees grew thick and the ways were dark and tangled. Blackberry brambles caught at her skirt, every glade was over-run with clematis and briony, in every ditch the lords-and-ladies drew their pale cowls over their red spikes of poisonberry; and the stems of the trees and bushes were powdered with a dry green mould, which gave to every vista a singular woodland glow. But Kitty was not afraid of *Natura Maligna*. Her small face, so politely sweet in the frame of her wide hat, expressed nothing but a happy freedom from personal care. There were no shadows on her forehead, not a wrinkle round her lips and eyelids or on the white throat which her net ruffle veiled from the sun. She walked with the smooth free swing of a tall woman,

and these miniature strides carried her over the ground more rapidly than one would have thought possible to a lady of five feet nothing who never seemed to be in a hurry. She was half a mile deep in the wood, near the green pond where rushes grew and waterhens nested, before Evelyn caught her up and claimed a lover's right by putting his arm round her waist. They were engaged to be married: had been half-engaged as far back as Kitty could remember. George Dent, fond as he was of Evelyn, but fonder of his sister, had recently asked her when the marriage was to come off. She had with difficulty prevailed on him not to put the same question to Evelyn.

Buried deep in the wood stood the Hunting Tower, where Henry V had passed a couple of nights when Lacy Evelyn offered his sovereign a day's hawking over the half-reclaimed fen-land from Babraham to Ely. There were rare wildfowl still on the river, hawk and heron, mallard and snipe. But the present Sovereign would not have cared to be accommodated in the present Tower. A tall round shaft of stone, loopholed for arrows, it had once risen clear on a spur of the Downs, but was now muffled in a dense under-growth of beech and hazel saplings, while the soil, centuries deep in leafmould, had drifted up and up round the walls till there was hardly room enough left to scramble in. There was no need of a key, however, for the door was open. Evelyn, with the energy which lazy men reserve for unimportant occasions, lay down flat on his stomach to examine the interior, then reversed himself and slid through feet first. A hollow voice floated out again, "Come along, Kitty-wee, there aren't any ghosts."

Miss Dent gave a pensive shrug. Her pretty dress, her pretty shoes! But it would have been against her principles to retreat, and hanging her hat on a branch she wriggled in and jumped down. To her surprise it was not a very long drop. Within as without, the ground had silted up, though not as far; an accumulation of dead leaves had drifted in and the floor was paved with them, so deeply that when she stood up the top of the archway was not much above her waist. It was incredibly dark. The wall was four feet thick and had no windows, and what little light struggled in from the door, through undergrowth and ivy, was all thrown down. She could see her own legs and Evelyn's, but from the knees up they were invisible to each other. Evelyn struck a match. Fitfully it irradiated an octagonal chamber of stone, fifteen or twenty feet high, and empty except for the drifted leaves and a quantity of loose dry straw.

"Some tramp has been dossing in here," said Evelyn. "That accounts for the open door. He must have forced the lock and sneaked the straw out of one of my ricks. Confound him, weren't three feet of dead leaves soft enough for him?" The match went out and once more darkness fell on them, a velvet dark that felt thick to the touch. "He must have had strong nerves. I couldn't sleep in here, could you?"

"But where are the loopholes?"

"All on the second floor. I expect they had that for the best bedroom."

"I didn't remember there was a second floor."

"Didn't you? It's solid enough, patched up at a later date, Tudor or Stuart: huge beams thrown across and socketed in the stone. There used to be the re-

mains of a staircase and trapdoor." He struck a second lucifer.

"Mind the straw," said Kitty.

"Here you are!" It ran up the wall, a winding wooden stair to which clung a few fragments of carved balustrade, little left of the rail, many of the steps worn away at one end and some broken down altogether. Evelyn instantly blew out his match and began to climb up it. Kitty did not warn him that the woodwork was probably rotten or that in any case it was a risky scramble in the dark. She waited till he was well ahead of her—and then she began to climb after him. "Hallo, are you coming too?" Evelyn hailed her cheerfully. "Mind the tenth step, there's a crack right across it. Don't throw your fourteen-stone weight on it. Miss it and put your foot on the next."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I can't reach," Kitty explained. "My legs are too short. Just lend me a hand, that is if you've anything to hang on to yourself." Precariously clinging to a broken baluster, Evelyn stooped to pull her after him. "It'll be rather difficult getting back," Kitty murmured. "Down's always worse than up."

"Wait while I reconnoitre, there seems to be a gap here." He lit a third match, taking good care to extinguish it before letting it fall. "There is a sort of a gap, but after that the steps go on pretty regularly to the top. Hold on till I get over this difficult bit, then I can attend to you." He swung himself up by both hands and one knee. "Now can you get along if

I give you one hand? Then I can hang on with the other."

"I—I think so," said Kitty, a little out of breath. The spirit was willing, the flesh was agile and wiry, but her legs were undeniably short and the flounced skirt was modishly tight round her knees. But it was dark in the Tower. . . . Kitty seized the black and grey frills and the white frills underneath them and bundled up all her petticoats not only round her waist but over her shoulders. It was far too dark for Evelyn to distinguish the slim legs in their pretty green breeches. . . . The last round of the ascent was comparatively easy. Evelyn flung up the trapdoor, emerged, produced an end of candle from his pocket, lit it, and drew Kitty after him—a Kitty enveloped in a shower of flounces, which fell lower and lower as she rose out of the hole till the green legs disappeared altogether with a little twist and shake. "There isn't much to see, is there?" said Evelyn: which was, Kitty reflected, precisely what he would say. "I wonder why we came up."

They were in a second octagonal stone chamber the counterpart of the first, equally bare except for masses of cobweb which hung like flags in every corner, and almost equally dark, for there were only three deep and narrow loopholes, and over all a dense mantle of ivy hung like a black blind. In the shadows of the raftered roof a bat colony, disturbed after years of peaceful habitation, turned their shrivelled necks and blinked down with cold snaky eyes at the tiny flame which Evelyn cherished in his hand.

"It was fun coming up anyhow," said Kitty sweetly. "Especially the last step but nine—the step that

wasn't there." She gave her little musical laugh. "I really thought we should both have rolled off together. I should have fallen soft on all those leaves, but I reflected with dismay that you would fall on top of me. We never shall get down—oh! Oh dear me, what in the world do you think you're doing?"

"Now say good morning!"

Setting the candle on the floor, deftly and daintily he had lifted Kitty, a hand under either arm, to the level of his own eyes. It was like lifting a child, she was so tiny and light—but a vexed child who tried to push him away. "No, Kitty, not your cheek. Hang it, I'm not George! One little kiss for good morning —no, the varlet isn't going to unhand you, and you can't run, this floor is pretty solid but I doubt if it would hold out under hide and seek. Besides, I'm holding you too fast. Didn't I warn you I'd hold you fast if you tried to run?"

"No! no!" said Kitty vehemently, struggling to release herself, "let me go this instant, Eve—ah! there now!" Either she or Evelyn had knocked over the end of candle, which instantly left them again in Egyptian darkness. "Oh mind, Eve, mind the trap-door!"

Evelyn had set her free the moment the light vanished. "Stand still; don't move while I strike a match." He struck three or four at once and held them up like a torch. Kitty had her back to the wall, one arm still raised to fend him off; in the wavering tawny glare her eyes shone wide and startled. "Why, Kitty-wee, what is it? One would think you had seen a ghost!"

"So I have."

"Henry V's?"

"The ghost of happier things," said Kitty under her breath.

"Bless her, isn't she oracular? On my word, if I were of a jealous disposition, I really should conclude there was a second Hector in the field. You may thank your small stars I'm not!" The lucifers were by now burning Evelyn's fingers, and with a hurried "Bother!" he blew them out and threw them away. "Let's go down, this place is *triste*—Hallo!"

"What?"

"Did you happen to notice what became of the candle?"

"No, why, haven't you any more matches?"

"Plenty. But wait half a second, darling, don't stir. . . ."

Kitty watched him go over to the trapdoor. Now that her eyes were used to the gloom there was light enough for her to see how his face changed when he reached it. Before he opened his lips, a wavering ruby ray of light reflected up as if out of a well over the whiteness of his face and hands, and striking on towards the dark height of the roof, told her in one appalling second what had happened. The candle that they had knocked over between them had rolled to the edge of the trap and fallen on the floor below. Nine times out of ten a candle goes out in falling, but this was one of the tenth times when it remains alight, and the loose dry straw was already in a blaze.

Kitty shook from head to foot. Her instinct was to make a dash for the staircase. She curbed it and was master of her own soul before at length after an endless moment Evelyn shut the trap and held out his

arms. "Rather alarming, isn't it? But there's no danger so long as we keep quiet till that little fuss downstairs has burnt itself out. Would you rather cut and run? I did think of it. But it took us five minutes to get up, and as you justly observed going down is always worse. Ten to one we should tumble off one of the broken steps and get rather badly scorched before we could crawl out of that narrow archway. Whereas we're perfectly safe up here—these beams are far too solid to burn."

"I can feel your heart going like a hammer."

"Hey?" said Evelyn, disconcerted.

"Feel," said Kitty. She seized his hand and pressed it against his thin shirt. "Oh, I know you're not afraid for yourself! After all these years, should I think that?" And what a pretty fellow a man would be, Evelyn reflected with a wry smile over the top of Miss Dent's head, if he were what a woman thinks him! Evelyn was most dreadfully frightened. He had the incontinent courage of the imaginative man, which is always getting him into hot corners and then deserting him; literally hot in the present instance, for between the solid joints underfoot there were innumerable cracks, through which an infernal rosy glow mounted brightening every moment. He would have given worlds to be out of the Tower. But he tried to look more heroic than he felt, though he really was not so well trained as Kitty, an out-of-door lady who had ridden to hounds since she was fifteen.

"There is danger, isn't there?" said Kitty.

"Yes."

"Rather bad danger?"

"Less since you're so cool. Dare you be left for a minute?"

"Why?"

"Because what I really fear is that the flames may catch from stair to stair till they reach this floor. They never would shoot up twenty feet, and the walls are stone, and the loopholes will give us a breath of air. But all the woodwork is wormy and as dry as tinder. Will you shut your eyes and not stir till I come back?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Break away as many steps as I can to widen the gap." He was scrambling through the trapdoor as he spoke. "By Jove, they're already alight at the bottom! Shut the door quick, darling, we don't want the place full of smoke."

"But if I shut it," Kitty objected, "while you're on the staircase, you'll be suffocated and fall." She knelt by the edge and peered down. Evelyn was already far below her, tearing away broken bits of stair and balustrade. The tower shaft was no longer dark. The floor was a whirl of fire: smoke was pouring up in blinding gusts right into the roof, stupefying the bats, which let go their hold and came swooping and fluttering down through the rafters: across a sullen universal glow of burning straw and leaves, arrowy sparkles that crackled and spat showed where the woodwork had caught in flaws of a keener flame. Evelyn raised his pale face for a moment.

"Do you mind shutting the door, please?"

"What, and shut you out?"

"The privilege of going first, my dear, is the only one we still claim."

"But you'll be stifled if I do. While it's open it draws up the smoke like a chimney."

"Oh for goodness' sake don't stand arguing, Kitty!"

"I can't," Kitty gasped, choking in the fumes that half hid him from her. "Oh Eve, come back—would you mind? I'm very sorry but I—I can't stand this—"

Drilled in a hard tradition, she did feel it her duty to let him die for her if he liked, but it was a duty too hard for her. What! crouch by the shut door and listen for a fall—cries perhaps? the cries that no fortitude can repress. . . .

Evelyn dashed the smoke out of his eyes. It was rapidly thickening, as the fire, from a mere surface blaze, took deeper and deeper root among the drifted heaps of leaf. His own attitude was almost untenable: indeed when he tried to recall it later he could not imagine what attitude it had been. He could not in cold blood see how a man could cling on head downward and lean across a gap to wrench the steps out of a stone wall; or how, having done it, he could ever get up and get back again. But the swirl of flames in the tower shaft would have lent a cripple wings. And there was Kitty piteously calling him, "Oh, no more, Eve, I can't, I can't bear it. . . ."

It was time. He could do no more. Blinded, suffocating, Evelyn turned to clamber back; but when he reached the trap he would have fallen off if Kitty had not seized him. Her arms under his shoulders, he crawled over it, shut it, and clung to her half fainting. He dared not let himself drop on the floor. Waifs of smoke were curling up over it, and through

its interstices the fierce furnace below shone as the waters of a river shine through a loose-built bridge. It was becoming intolerably hot and the chatter of leaves and the sharper crackling of woodwork were merging into one loud continuous roar; and in the middle through every wider crack could be seen orange-coloured tongues darting along the sides of the Tower, yellow whips of flame that struck up and up—how far? Impossible to judge: they might have been ten feet below, or not ten inches.

"Come over here," said Kitty, and in her arms Evelyn staggered over to a loophole. It was the barest arrow-slit and sunk four feet deep in the wall, but in its embrasure the air was comparatively fresh and the floor was solid underfoot. Kitty tried to tear away the ivy. She could reach it only with her fingertips, but she broke off a leaf or two. How strange to see pale autumn sunshine gleaming on a green branch!

"Suppose the floor doesn't catch, how long will the fire take to burn out?"

Evelyn had no idea. "Oh, no time: a bonfire of leaves is soon through, and the lower strata must be practically sodden with last winter's rains. I should think only this summer's leaves will burn. Let's see if we can make anyone hear."

They called again and again, but through such a deep loophole and the dense ivy beyond it no voice could have carried, and in a little while they desisted by common consent, exhausted, and chilled by an increased sense of loneliness, like a man frightened by the sound of his own voice in an empty house. "No use," said Evelyn. "No one ever comes this way."

"No: or if they did they would see the smoke before

they heard us calling. . . . I wish I could have said goodbye to George."

"*Kitty!* don't talk like that," said Evelyn, shuddering. "You mustn't die. You're too young."

"'Queens have died young and fair,'" Kitty murmured with a gleam of mischief. "These things do happen. Shipwrecks, train disasters—and always, I suppose, the people in them have this silly feeling of surprise, not to say indignation. . . . But what a headline for the evening papers! 'Famous Pianist's Terrible Fate.' We ought to be praying. I wonder if we shall find Philip. Are you afraid?"

"Rather, for you."

"I'm not."

"But it was my fault—I brought you here."

"No, I came for the fun of it. Oh, thank heaven I did come!"

But if she had not come Evelyn would have run for it when he first saw the fire. It was the remembrance of Kitty's light inflammable flounces that had held him back—not to say the shortness of her legs. Besides, he was a man, and could not help taking the practical view that it was a pity two lives should be lost in place of one, instead of the sentimental view that it was consoling to die together. It was no consolation at all to Evelyn to have Kitty with him if he was going to die, he would really rather have been free to be as much of a coward as he liked. For his life he could not help smiling at her—"I'm not a bit glad you came, darling."

Blind to shades of dramatic irony, Kitty raised her face, pearl-white under grey smears of smoke and dust. "Eve, look down there. The flames are aw-

fully near now and there are any quantity of sparks flying about; and there's more smell of burning wood too. I believe this floor is beginning to char." He thought so too and was silent. "May I hide my eyes?"

"Here," said Evelyn, taking her to his heart and straining her to him in a passion of remorseful pity. "Oh, Kitty, if I could die twenty times over to save you!" She gave a soft sigh and nestled her head down like a child preparing to sleep.

"Then you do love me?"

"What do you say?"

"What I asked you in the garden half an hour ago. Don't laugh at me; I've always wondered and never known, and this was my last chance, if we're going to die. Don't, don't laugh! you're not quite like other men, and I—I'm sentimental at heart like all women. But you do love me: if we had lived you would have married me, and not only to satisfy George—you would have liked to be married to me?"

Then he lied to her. "I would give my soul to be married to you now."

And till that moment he had never known it was a lie: but he knew it then. He loved her as the dearest of friends and comrades, more to him than any man, infinitely more than any other woman: she fascinated him, lying in his arms in her fresh and pale beauty, serene on the brink of death with her cool high-spirited temperament, the counterpart of his own. But he did not want to marry her, or anyone, and in his clasp there was no passion, nothing but tenderness and pity: he had drifted into his engagement without looking to its end or his own limitations, but now he realised that the ties of human union were not for him. All

the bent of his nature turned towards solitude and freedom. Even his friends tired him when they came too near—his mother, Philip, George Dent, even Hurst and Meredith, he could not bear them to watch him; his instinct had always been to glimmer and evade. Was that why Hurst called him a Faun? . . . What covert of the wild woods is left to a Faun entrapped in a mortal marriage?

He might have been warned. A man to whom women were gracious, Evelyn had sought pleasure now and again, but it had never pleased him; those experiments had always begun in good nature and ended in disgust. All his life he had remained essentially cold to women, and he was ice-cold now to Kitty Dent; for all her beauty, Evelyn half hated her for begging from him what he had not to give. But one must fulfil the obligations of a gentleman.

"If we escape, I shall never dare to let you out of my sight again. You won't put me off?"

"No."

But with a smile full of irony Evelyn reflected that they were not likely to escape. He hated himself for lying to Kitty, and yet was cynical enough to run up a deeper debt because the bill would never be presented for payment. "It'll be white satin and orange-blossoms for you the day after to-morrow, and then no more goodbyes. I, not love you, Kitty? If we escape you'll soon learn whether or no I want to marry you. I—Hallo!"

"What is it?"

"I thought I heard some one shouting," Evelyn explained with a complete change of manner and a drop of some twenty degrees in the emotional temperature.

"Hang out of the window, darling, you're smaller than I am and I can give you a leg up."

He lifted Kitty into the arrowslit and made her wave her handkerchief while they both shouted together. Faint and far off over the roar of the flames an answering cry reached them—George Dent's voice, the words indistinguishable, the tone cheery: and with it, drowning it, a tremendous hiss of water, volumes of smoke and steam. . . .

Twenty minutes later the adventure was over as abruptly as it had begun. Pails of water fetched from the neighbouring pond had put the fire out almost instantly. The drenched leaves were still smouldering underneath, the walls were blackened, the stair was consumed, part of the ceiling had begun to char—but when a farm ladder had been reared up to the trapdoor, and Dent's head and shoulders rose over it, Evelyn still had enough energy left to carry Kitty over the scorching beams, though before he reached Dent he was so faint that he fell with her in his arms. Dent caught her from him, got her into the open air, and returned to help Evelyn down; and by the time Evelyn had been half led, half lifted through the hurriedly excavated doorway, Kitty was sitting up and trying to smooth her hair.

"But what on earth were you two idiots doing up the Tower?" demanded George Dent. He had been frightened out of his life and his tone was almost as warm as the whitehot stones of the doorway. "You ought to be locked up each in a separate lunatic asylum! If I hadn't happened to cut through the wood and catch sight of all that smoke—! And even

then I only thought it was some fool of a tramp. When I saw Kitty's hat you could have knocked me down with a feather! Deaf as two posts, too, I've been shouting for half an hour—”

“Dearest, why spoil the flavour of a good action by doing it ungraciously?” Kitty murmured. “You enjoyed rescuing us and we enjoyed being rescued, so what more do you want? You're so captious. Really we found it all very pleasant, didn't we, Eve?”

“Not all,” said Evelyn. “I wasn't happy when I was hanging on to nothing head downwards. I was dreadfully afraid I should fall off and burn my hands.” He examined his fingertips regretfully. “As it is, they're so scratched I shan't be able to touch a note for a fortnight. No: it was a tophole adventure with a thrilling climax, but a trifle too expensive for a professional man like me.”

## CHAPTER V.

“**G**EORGE.”

“My sister?”

“Eve is coming round to-morrow morning to have a little chat with you—unless he forgets.”

George Dent, who was sitting in a leathern arm-chair with his feet in the fender, holding up the *Telegraph* between him and an autumnal fire, lowered the paper to look over the top of it. “Unless he forgets, hey?”

“Which I don’t think he will,” said Kitty. The mistress of the Manor Farm never lounged; she sat erect, her knees crossed, her fingers flying round the heel of a silk sock, her silver gilt hair tied with a silver fillet which harmonised with a lilac-coloured gauze dress and silver buckles on lilac shoes. George Dent, though his dinner jacket was much the worse for wear, had the same well-washed and well-brushed appearance as his sister; different in all else, they were alike in a military neatness and precision.

The Dents came of old yeoman stock, and George, when he had to state his profession, still wrote “Farmer” in his thick, small, black writing, clear as print. The Manor Farm was a very different place from Temple Evelyn. It was a middle-sized house of no architectural pretensions, the greater part of it Victorian roughcast under a tapestry of Virginian creeper, Dijon roses, and wistaria. A couple of dormer windows, a patch of old tiles, and some oak-

beamed ceilings on the first floor were all that was left of the original building. George Dent's father had thrown out wide sunny bays and a porch, and George himself had reduced the lawn to velvet, while Kitty clipped yews and planted roses on either side of its flagged pathway; but no attempt had been made to screen off the mossy barns and golden hay-ricks that lay behind the house, clustered under golden beech-woods on the chalky slope of the Hills.

The Dents had risen in the world. John, the father of George and Kitty, had "married a lady," as people used to say even as late as the nineties, and a lady who brought him wealth and a strain of beauty as well as her love and her crystalline delicacy of taste. He sent his son to Rugby and his daughter to Girton. But John Dent himself had had to be content with a local grammar school, and Henry, two generations ago, had learnt his three R's with the village boys, and touched his cap to the Evelyn family to his dying day. The young Dents were well off now and could have lived at ease in idleness, but George kept on the farm because he loved the work of it, and when at home Kitty for the same reason tied herself into a blue overall every morning wet or dry, and laboured like Fair Margaret of Freshingfield in chicken run or dairy. Indeed she was happier there than staying in Kensington with her mother's family.

As commonly happens in such cases, the brother and sister had made as many friends as they cared to know, at first among people whom they met away from home, and later by reflex action in Cambridge and their own neighbourhood. The last barrier had fallen when the wife of a war millionaire referred to Kitty Dent,

in the hearing of a great lady of the countryside, as "only a farmer's daughter." Mrs. Blundell had never called on Kitty, but this temerity of the New Rich awoke in her gentle bosom the defensive instinct of a feudal lord. The next day her pony carriage trotted up to the Manor Farm gates.

The Dents had risen in the world while the Evelyns were standing still. The roll of Evelyn names was long and not undistinguished, but the Victorian era chronicled no courtier-politician like Lacy Evelyn, no soldier like Ralph the hero of Marston Moor, no wit like Lawrence the poet-friend of Charles Sedley, nor even such a beau as Robert, *ame damnée* of the Regent. Perhaps in the close atmosphere of Victorian respectability their genius was not adapted to flourish. They had lost money too, partly through depreciation of land values and partly through foolish speculation. Geoffrey Evelyn dropped big sums on the Turf, his son Edmund burnt his fingers over the Jameson Raid. There never was a man of Evelyn stock that could refuse a bet or a loan, till Philip Evelyn—who was a Masson—came into the estates.

The Masson blood, his mother's blood, had brought in an acquisitive strain, and during Philip's long minority, while Mrs. Evelyn held the reins, her son had gone heart and soul with her in her struggle to clear off the mortgage which her husband, before breaking his neck in the hunting field, had laid on the land. It was done before Mrs. Evelyn's death. Philip at twenty-four was master in his own house. But a good deal of Mrs. Evelyn's own money had gone in the process, and there was not enough left to keep up Temple Evelyn except by rigorous care. A never-ending cause

of dissension between her sons had been the inability of the younger to keep within what the elder called a generous allowance. Philip was in the right, for he gave his brother more than he kept for himself. But then, as the exasperated Philip was eternally forgetting and eternally being forced to remember, Charles was incapable of seeing straight in money matters. For him, two and two always made three and a grievance.

After his mother's death, Philip showed less common sense in objecting to Charles Evelyn's passion for music, which Mary Evelyn had fostered. Herself a keen musician, she was delighted when the boy learnt his notes before he was out of petticoats, and began to play sonatas and compose waltzes at the innocent age of five. She taught him by the oldfashioned drastic method that she had learnt in Germany in 1850-60, Kalkbrenner's method, a rod to enforce wrist and finger action by keeping down the forearm. She put him through the books that had formed her own musical library—Catel's treatise on harmony, Cherubini's on counterpoint, Mozart's *Succinct Thoroughbass*. At sixteen in the teeth of Philip's grumbles he was taken from Rugby to become one of Letchetizsky's piano pupils in Vienna, two years later he went to Petrograd to study composition under Rimsky-Korsakov; and the single bond of union between him and his mother was her joy in his early triumphs—his first appearance on a Leipzig concert platform, a kindly letter from Troldhaugen, a May term production—to her most precious of all,—, by the veteran conductor of the C. U. M. S., of a Rhapsody written when he was twenty and under the spell of Brahms.

But even this tie was weakened after a year at Cambridge and a second year in Paris, when the young man began to strike out on a path of his own, turning from "the Lorelei of the Rhine and the Sirens of the Mediterranean" towards the verve and gaiety and impeccable art of France. Mrs. Evelyn considered Massenet shallow, d'Indy grotesque, and *Pelléas* simply immoral. "This makes me regret the money spent on Evelyn's musical education," she said to Philip, after trying over a couple of exceedingly French duets. "There's no doubt that God has given him a great talent. But what is the use of it if it's to be frittered away on foolish and wicked songs like these?" Philip's shrug was tantamount to an "I told you so."

In Philip's opinion the most sensible thing his brother ever did was to get engaged to Kitty Dent. The Manor was the largest of the Temple Evelyn farms, and held on immemorial leasehold; and perhaps one might have expected Philip, a Conservative through and through, to look down on the children of his father's tenants. But there had never been any feeling of disparity between them. The relations between the houses had altered in the course of years, Edmund Evelyn had borrowed money and listened occasionally to good advice from John Dent, the exquisite and whimsical Lucilla Dent had from the first found her best friend in grave Mary Evelyn, and so in the present generation the three boys and the one girl had all grown up together, and it was George and Kitty who kept the smouldering feud between the Evelyn brothers from flaring into an open quarrel.

George Dent alone of the four did not forget that his grandfather had touched his hat to Charles Evelyn's grandfather. For himself he did not care, he had no pride, or too much pride: but he was sensitive for his sister.

"Just tell me how the land lies, Kitty."

Kitty waited to turn her needle before giving the required information, but when it came it was clear. "He wants to settle the day for our marriage. I suggested next spring, but apparently our ridiculous adventure in the Hunting Tower this morning has frightened him, and he doesn't want to wait more than a month or six weeks. Just time for me to buy my clothes."

"And what do you say?"

"Oh! I don't want to wait either. We've been engaged such a long while, and it's not as though there were anything particular to wait for. I should like a day late in November or early in December. Then we could get over the honeymoon and be back in London by the New Year."

"So then if that's what he suggests I'm to agree?"

"Please."

But George Dent was not altogether pleased. He dreaded losing his sister, for he was a sociable man and the Manor Farm would be lonely to him when she was gone; and he was not sure that marriage to Charles Evelyn would make her happy. He repressed a sigh and turned a leaf of the *Telegraph*. "There's no man I'm so fond of as I am of Eve. It's a great thing to have known each other all your lives; there's not much chance for either of you to get let in. It's a bit awkward all the same. There are such things as

settlements, but I don't know what Eve's got to settle on you. If he were to die without issue, the estate would all go to the Hampshire lot, and there's precious little personal property. He ought to insure his life, but unless it was done through his bankers he'd never remember to keep up the payments, and my impression is that he's always overdrawn. I said a word about it to Fenwick one day—Fenwick knows I know more about Eve's concerns than Eve does himself: he wouldn't commit himself, but he made a wry face and murmured something about stretching a point for old and honoured clients like the Evelyns that had banked with them for over a century. And then they say there's no sentiment in business!"

"I had rather you didn't talk to Eve about settlements."

"It's usual, Kitty: though perhaps I oughtn't to talk about it to you. But you've got such a sound head, more like a man's than a woman's, one forgets you're only a woman after all."

Knit seven, knit two together, turn your needle. "This is precisely why I spoke to you beforehand. You may tie up my own money as tight as you please—I'd like you to: tie it up to me and my children so that Eve can't touch it and I can't touch it for him; but don't try to make Eve settle any money on me. Don't raise the subject with him at all. He certainly won't if you don't, because it won't occur to him. If you try to bully him, George, you'll make me very unhappy."

"I bully Eve?"

"It'll come to that if you worry him about his duty to me. It's no use pretending that Eve is like other

men. He isn't; and the ideas that occur normally to other men never seem to come near his horizon. That's one of the joys of marrying a genius. But then it cuts both ways; a great many men would resent the tying up of my own money, whereas Eve, if it ever dawns on him at all, will be charmed. But if you bully him you'll make him miserable, and—" she lingered over her work.

"Go on, my dear," said Dent, watching her kindly.

Purl seven, purl two together, turn your needle. "You'll make him not want to marry me."

"Kitty!"

"Oh! he will marry me," said Kitty with a faint ironical smile. "He won't throw me over. Eve would never break a promise or let a woman down. But I shall represent a duty to him; and I'd rather represent a pleasure."

"He'd be hard to please if you didn't," said her brother shortly.

"He is exceedingly hard to please."

"Well, I wish you were going to marry an ordinary man. I couldn't be fonder of Eve if he were my own brother, but there are times when I should like to take a stick to him. Don't talk to me about genius! Genius is neither here nor there when a fellow's going to marry your sister. What I should like to see in your husband is good firm solid character and a grasp of principle. I should just like to know what sort of comfort you'll get out of Eve when you've got six children all down with whooping-cough!"

"Oh," Kitty smiled again at her flitting needles, "his children, if he ever has any, will have to shift for themselves."

George Dent cleared his throat. "Do you—are you very fond of him, my dear?"

"Yes, very," said Kitty without emphasis. "Much too fond of him ever to marry anyone else. You know I've always liked adventures, and Eve makes other men seem so tame and ordinary. It's far more interesting never to know what's going to happen next. Besides, I'm used to the idea of marrying Eve, and I'm too much of a Dent and a Conservative to change my mind."

"H'm; well, one of these days I shall take a stick to him," said George Dent.

Evelyn did not forget. He appeared next morning at eleven o'clock with a gun under his arm, dressed in a very old shooting suit which he had unearthed from the wardrobe where it had lain since his brief University days. Vaulting in at the library window, he found Dent writing letters in a revolving seat before an American desk full of orderly files. Evelyn dropped across a chair and flung his legs over the arm of it, and Dent, his pipe in his mouth, got up and took his gun away. "It was at half-cock," he explained resignedly. "You're not fit to be trusted with a gun license." Evelyn said "Oh bother," and reached for a cushion. "Have something to drink?" Evelyn shook his head. "Have an apple," Dent then suggested, pushing over a bodge basket full of russets which was not so full as it had been an hour ago.

Evelyn took a large one and bit into it. He was looking, not exactly shy, but coy and perverse: like a thoroughbred, Dent reflected, sidling before a fence which it knows it will have to take by and by. Dent

got up and stood before the fire with his hands in his pockets, the smile on his firm lips tinged with sadness. He was so very fond of Evelyn—in any other capacity than that of a brother-in-law! Dent had known him too long to have any illusions left, but he still had much love, infinite tolerance, and, strangely dashed across, that haunting memory of the relations between their fathers. Evelyn was still the lord of the manor and Dent the yeoman farmer, though Dent had fagged Evelyn at school and stood between him and Philip's wrath at home. After all one had no right to expect from that finer stock the plain common sense of common men. . . . Somewhere at the back of Dent's mind there lingered, defiant of Democratic Progress, an idea that the chief duty of an Evelyn was to exist gracefully.

"That's a nice suit, Eve: where did you get it from?"

"Out of my wardrobe," replied Evelyn innocently, and in absence of mind: "it's an old one."

"No, is it? But I thought it might be, because you've got a hole in your trousers."

"Where?"

Dent indicated the locality with the stem of his pipe.

"Oh bother! I shall have to go home and change."

"Unless you would like Kitty to lend you a pinafore."

"Are you being amusing by any chance? So sorry, if you would warn me beforehand I'd try to be amused. Hand me over that *Telegraph*." Evelyn disposed the newspaper in front of him. "That's in case Kitty should come in. All the same I wish moth and rust

wouldn't corrupt, it's so ruinously expensive to be always buying clothes. I'd borrow yours if you weren't so wide in the beam." Dent smiled serenely, pulling up his coat tails to feel the warmth of the fire on his legs. He was broadshouldered and thick-set, but lean from much riding and as hard as nails. "I really must have Fraser up, he can always find me something to put on, which is more than I can. I've just had to buy some pyjamas in the village, I don't seem to have any."

"No pyjamas?"

"Well, I can't see any. There aren't any in my drawer."

"You don't want me to come over and look for your pyjamas, do you?" Dent asked, not entirely ironical; he had done odder jobs than that for Charles Evelyn from time to time. "Anyhow I can tell you where they are without going round. You've forgotten to send them to the wash and consequently they haven't come back from it. You'll find them—lots of them—in your clothes basket. It's not the slightest use expecting Malyon to valet you because he never even valeted Philip. You'd better wire to Fraser at once. Then he'll come up in a puff-puff and put them in a bag and by and by you'll get them back nice and clean."

"That'll do," said Evelyn. "I'm too depressed to hit you except in self-defence, but I shall have to do it if you go on much longer. Human nature cannot stand the strain of George Dent trying to be witty. I came to have a business talk with you and you've put it all out of my head." He paused to fling the remains of his apple violently out of the window. "I

do wish you wouldn't give me apples that have maggots in. I've eaten two-thirds of it."

"Two-thirds of the apple?"

"No, of the maggot. And I want to talk about Kitty."

"I know," said Dent quickly. He had not been Evelyn's friend for nearly thirty years without coming to understand when Evelyn's waywardness was mere waywardness and when it covered some sort of distress, shyness or modesty: and Dent's instinct like Kitty's was to soothe that distress at any cost. "I know, old man—Kitty told me. You're going to carry her off. I shall hate losing her, but I'd rather give her to you than to anyone else." Face to face with Evelyn he could say it sincerely.

"I fancied you didn't much care for me in the quality of Kitty's husband."

Well, who would have suspected Evelyn of guessing that? There were no limits either to his stupidity or to his shrewdness. Dent could have sworn that he had never betrayed his qualms before Evelyn; how could he have done so, when in Evelyn's presence he ceased to feel them? He shrugged his shoulders. "Don't be fanciful. I can't imagine Kitty's marrying anyone but you."

"Nor can I," said Evelyn candidly. "But the inevitable isn't always the ideal. I'm not. . . I shan't. . . ."

"Take your time, old fellow," said Dent smiling at him.

He liked the quiet dignity of Evelyn's answer, so frank and grave under the visible nervous strain. There must be better stuff in him than one sometimes

gave him credit for: less childishness, harder fibre, greater self-control.

"I love Kitty, and I know she loves me, and I mean to do my best to make her happy. But there is some ground for your fears. Artists—and I am one if I'm anything at all—are a self-centered lot. I don't think much of myself as a husband for any woman."

Dent turned round with his back to Evelyn and fixed his expressionless, clear, blue eyes on the fire. "There's only one question I should like to ask you. May I?"

"Anything."

"Are you in any way entangled with any other woman?"

"Now or in the past?"

"Now," said Dent hastily.

"No, on my honour." Dent raised his head with a quick sigh as if relieved of a weight. "Not a soul now or for two or three years gone by. In fact so far as that goes there hasn't been much at any time that I shouldn't care to tell Kitty; and I did offer to tell her what there is, but she declined to listen. No, that's not where I'm so conscious of shortcomings!" He raised his eyes, the eyes of Selwyn Yarborough's painting, melancholy and wistful, clear yet veiled. "But what's the good of my saying this to you? Haven't you known me all my life and better than anyone else does? You've always known what a fool I am. I ought to drop it—that sort of thing ceases to have any charm when you're nearing the thirties—but I can't, I always forget. Look at my taking Kitty up into the Hunting Tower yesterday!"

"She took herself," said Dent drily.

"I ought to have stopped her."

"Ought you? well, we all of us ought to do a lot of things we don't do. It's no use crying over spilt milk; and on my conscience, Eve, I don't believe you can help it—or Kitty either; it's six of one and half a dozen of the other, and no power on earth would put sense into either of you or keep you out of mischief. So long as you do nothing worse than risk your own life or Kitty's I shan't grumble. Besides, you can't always be such a lunatic as you are now; when you have Fraser to send your shirts to the wash and Kitty to darn your breeks and six children all down with measles to teach you the value of money—" he paused: this was trenching on forbidden ground. "I've no doubt the pair of you will sober down after a bit. So long as you aren't unfaithful to her: that's what would hit her hardest, and that's what I most fear in you." Evelyn smiled. It was a piece of life's irony that Dent's fears should concentrate on the one risk Kitty would never run. "Oh, you may laugh now! But you're such a scatterbrained chap: and everyone knows that artists are a loose-living lot. You don't mind my speaking out? We've come pretty close together before now: and so did our fathers before us."

"A link in the chain?"

"Chain, what chain?" said Dent, at fault.

"That's what Kitty said. You and she are alike at times for all your thick head. I wish I had the same picturesque sentiment, but I'm as indifferent to my fathers as to my children! However, I'll try to take care of the Kitty-wee if you'll give her to me?"

"With all my heart," said Dent without conscious

inconsistency. He stretched out his broad palm, and Evelyn, still thrown anyhow across his chair, put his thin fingers into it and smiled up at his friend. He was less shy with Dent than with anyone else. The restless mind found rest on the bosom of that thoughtful, calm, shrewd, and unimaginative loyalty. Blessed are the friends who neither fail us, nor understand!

Dent too was moved by his own evocation of the past with all that it implied, the grace and delicacy of the younger man pointing a distinction of which the elder was in that moment piercingly aware. He held Evelyn's hand lightly and respectfully. "It's a bit of a come-down," he said without affectation, "for an Evelyn to marry a Dent."

"Oh, là-là! Oh, by Jove!"

Evelyn's gravity put on for the occasion gave way before this unexpected turn. He got up out of his chair, instantly letting fall the *Telegraph*, and sat on the windowsill laughing at Dent with every feature of his handsome, careless face. "Mon petit bonhomme de Georges, you and your feudal tradition! I wish you would inoculate Kitty with it, wouldn't she be a pearl among wives?"

Dent patted him on the shoulder. "You run home and change your trousers."

## CHAPTER VI

EDMUND MEREDITH, who was the most intimate of Evelyn's London friends, had a service flat in Streets Mews, where he lived in what he described as modest comfort. He had no profession, but did a good deal of musical criticism for various journals—a column of London notes for one, foreign critiques for a second, and so on; and possessing a knack of style, masculine and polished if a trifle precious, and a wide acquaintance with music and musicians, he could always find a market for his wares. He called himself an amateur penman—"a mere dabbler," but "You, an amateur?" was the proper reply. Unfortunately, for some reason which he never could fathom, veteran journalists like Wright and Hurst showed an inclination to take him at his word! Wright's chaff was merely irritating, because he did not like Wright; but he did wish sometimes that old Hurst would not eye him with such a kindly tolerant smile. Meredith liked Hurst, and would have given a good deal to be on even terms with him. But there seemed to be a barrier, impalpable, impassable: strange!

Meredith's rooms were wide and warm and not, like Evelyn's, overcrowded with furniture. With their parquet floors, their white walls and ceilings, and the absence of carpet or curtain, they suggested a good deal of foreign, possibly Spanish experience. Any edge of English chill was taken off by the glow of

hammered brasswork and the red of stamped leather and the agreeable duskiness of books on oak shelves. On a wet October evening it was pleasant to come into them out of wind and rain and find Meredith alone by the fire with a morocco volume on his knee and a box of cigars on the revolving bookcase beside him. Entering unannounced and without even the formality of knocking, Evelyn sat down cross-legged on a Persian rug and stretched out his hands to the warmth of the flames. He had come without an overcoat; the rain glittered on his tweed suit and a drop or two shone on his hair.

"Hallo!" said Meredith, observing with dry internal amusement that Evelyn's clothes were untouched by conventional signs of mourning, "where do you spring from? I thought you were still in Cambridgeshire."

"No, I'm in town for a day or two, buying things. I've got to go to my tailor's. And to Manton's. Are you doing anything to-morrow? If not I do wish you would come with me."

"To your tailor's?"

"No, to Manton's. I don't feel up to it."

Now Manton was a Regent Street jeweler of world-wide fame. "I will with pleasure, but why?"

Evelyn threw himself into a chair, crossed his legs, and took a cigar. "Jolly comfortable rooms these are: plenty of space in them. Mine are too full of furniture. I've a good mind to scrap the lot. I hate feeling overcrowded."

"Match?" suggested Meredith. "—Overcrowding is more a matter of persons than of furniture. I like to be able to move about without knocking over

a table, but the main thing is having the place to oneself."

Evelyn moved restlessly. "Shall you never marry then?"

Meredith's smile broadened. A sheet of plate glass would have been more opaque to him than Evelyn at that moment. So the boy was meditating matrimony? And at close quarters apparently if he was in town to buy wedding presents. What a pity! It is always a pity, in Meredith's opinion, for a man of Evelyn's temperament and profession to put his neck into the noose; an artist needs freedom—the mental and moral elbowroom that the best of wives will deprive him of.

"By the by, I wrote to you at Temple Evelyn a few weeks ago, but you never answered. I hope you had my letter? I was so sorry to hear of your trouble."

"What trouble?"

"Your brother's death."

"Oh, that!" Evelyn's tone was certainly inimitable in its detachment. The fraternal tie often means little or nothing, and Meredith remembered to have heard rumours that no love had been lost between the Evelyn brothers, yet most men, he thought, would have made some concession in manner to the etiquette of bereavement. Evelyn himself after a moment seemed to become aware of a deficiency. "Yes, it was a cruel business. Thank you so much for writing. I had your letter; I forgot I never answered it. I've had my hands full these last few weeks, what with lawyers and other worries. I had to cancel some of my autumn engagements, too. You must forgive me, I am a careless chap but I'm not really ungrateful!"

He smiled at Meredith and Meredith returned his smile with an involuntary softening of his rather cold blue eyes. A man of many acquaintances and no friends, Meredith kept for Evelyn a warmth of feeling as near affection as it was in his nature to bestow. "It's that dash of the woman in you that makes you so attractive," he said to himself, definite as ever in his analysis of life. "Hang it, I've known many a woman that hadn't a tithe of your charm! Well, what is it you want? Evidently you've come here for what you can get, and it suits my humour to oblige you. Let's listen to the boy's confidences, they may be amusing and they're safe to be pretty. What an innocent face it is for eight and twenty!" Aloud he said, "And what might you be doing *chez* Manton, young Evelyn?"

"Oh, buying things."

"Naturally. I did not suppose you were going to make him a present!"

Evelyn turned his face towards the fire, whose glow was reflected on it in a faint redness. His conversation was not much more disconnected than usual, but his eyes betrayed him at every turn. "Are you never lonely, Meredith?"

"Never. This life suits me. I can go out when I like and stay in when I like. To-night you find me sitting over the fire with a book, to-morrow night I'm doing a dinner, a play, and a dance. Shall I never marry? Well, one of these days I may. In the forties or fifties one begins to want a home and youngsters growing up in it. But you're not thirty yet, are you?"

"Have you ever seen a woman you would like to marry?"

Meredith shifted in his chair. "Yes," he said with easy emphasis. "Half a dozen."

"Six, but not one?"

"I don't say that." He leant forward to shake the ash from his cigar, a nervous movement: the spark of excitement under Evelyn's shy manner had communicated itself to the elder man, and on his face too there was a slight glow. "One's had one's dreams perhaps."

"Wouldn't she have you?"

"My friend, that is one of the questions that aren't asked!"

"I beg your pardon ten thousand times!" Evelyn exclaimed, coming out of his abstraction. "I never meant to say it."

"I do not mind, because in point of fact I never gave her the chance. The . . . affair . . . such as it is, hasn't matured yet. I may ask her next year or I may not, when I meet her in town again, or it's barely possible I may run across her this winter; she may have gone off, in which case I shall consider that I've had a lucky escape, or she may have come on, and then. . . . But this is all absolutely in the clouds." It had been, till now: and he marvelled at himself for letting slip a hint of it, but after all Evelyn was evidently in the same boat and could not chaff him. And this first confession of a modest secret disengaged a faint yet distinct perfume of sensuous pleasure, as if the scent of roses were diffusing itself through one's bachelor cigar-smoke.

"What is she like?"

"Not so tall as I am," the soft accent of a caress

was just perceptible in Meredith's voice: "very fair, very slight."

"Well, that might be a description of the girl I'm going to marry," said Evelyn slowly, raking the fire into a twinkle of flame. "How hot you keep your rooms on a warm night like this! You never knew I was engaged, did you? I have been for years—oh, ages: practically ever since we were in petticoats. Since my brother died we've come to the conclusion that we may as well bring it off now as later on, so it's to be the first week in November. What I want to do at Manton's is to buy her a wedding present. I thought of diamonds—women generally like diamonds, don't they? She's got a dressing case already and all those sort of things. But I can't afford more than two or three hundred, do you think I could get her anything really decent for that?"

Meredith arched his eyebrows. Two or three hundred pounds! Wasn't that Evelyn all over? He was a far richer man than Evelyn, but fifteen or twenty would have been his own idea of a suitable price. "Oh, certainly! If you are hard up," he said quite gravely, "you might even cut it down to a hundred and fifty."

"Do you really think so? It runs into a frightful lot of money, getting married; there's the journey you see—I suppose we shall have to go somewhere for a week or two, though I do very badly want to get to work again, this has all been a great interruption. And hotel bills for two cost more than they do for one. Besides, if I were by myself I should stay at places that one couldn't take a lady to."

"Unfortunately one can't go for a honeymoon by oneself."

"No: so that I should be glad to get off for £150 if I could. Only I do want it to look good. I'd have made it a fender if I could have run to it. You will come round with me, won't you? I haven't the remotest notion what girls like."

Meredith contemplated him as if he were an interesting natural specimen. "I wonder whether you'll turn up in time for the ceremony. Who's going to be best man?"

"I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind."

"I?"

"Yes: you'd do it so awfully well."

"I accept with pleasure," said Meredith after a momentary pause. "Although for a naturally indolent person like myself the prospect bristles with alarming contingencies. Let me review my duties: item No. 1 will be getting you out of bed and attending to your toilet. You can brush your own teeth, I suppose, and say your own prayers, but I wonder if you can be trusted not to show up in a blazer and a smoking cap? Oh, I forgot—Fraser will be there to dress you. Well, that lightens my burden. But I'm to choose the wedding present for the bride, it appears, and—have you given her an engagement ring?"

"Not yet."

"Not yet? I understood you to say you had been engaged for years. Well, we'll get that too at Manton's to-morrow. It's a pity, for at your rates it'll cut into another £50, but it can't be helped. Perhaps I had better take my own cheque book along?"

"Happy thought," said Evelyn with levity, "then I can make it a fender after all!"

"Then there's the license to be obtained: or are you going to be married by banns?" Evelyn had not considered the point. "Nor you haven't settled where you're going for your honeymoon? Has the lady no views?—Better say the South of France, then, or the Italian Riviera; I know half a dozen jolly little places that will suit you to a T. You can't go for less than a month, and you can't stick it out in England in November, it is trying enough—one's told—at the best of times, but honeymooning in a frozen drizzle would quench the ardours of a Romeo. Yes, I know you have a playful way of losing your connections and your luggage. It's a pity I can't escort you, at least till the—the first stage of the journey is safely accomplished. But don't be downcast, I'll look up your trains for you and take your ticket; leave it all to me—you'll be safe in my hands."

"That's exactly what I hoped you'd say," said Evelyn gratefully. "I felt sure you would know all about it and so you do: anyone would think you'd been married half a dozen times yourself!"

"It'll be a useful rehearsal for me. Not the first: I've officiated at other weddings besides yours." Meredith stretched himself indolently and luxuriously in his chair. Evelyn was not apparently an ardent lover, but the subject in itself was one that fired Meredith's imagination, strongly developed on the sensuous side. He had never been married, but of unofficial relations he had had a fairly wide experience, and his mind warmed to an agreeable glow of memories mingling with anticipations. He leaned forward and lightly

dropped a hand on Evelyn's knee. "You're not effusive, are you? As a rule one has more than enough of Romeo's raptures. But now . . . since we're shepherds both, you might expand a bit. Is she pretty, Eve, old boy?"

"Very."

"By Jove, I envy you. You're a lucky chap. But so you always were. . . . By the by, what will Sophy say?"

"Sophy?"

"Yes—won't she cut up rather rough?"

Evelyn lifted his eyes, wide in non-comprehension. "What on earth should Sophy have to say to my getting married, one way or the other?"

"Haven't you told her?"

"No—I haven't seen her since it was settled. I've only been in town a few hours. Why should I see her?"

"I think I would if I were you. Sophy has French blood in her, you know: a quick temper and a devil of a lot of temperament. She's a sensible girl and I don't doubt it'll be all right if you put it to her straight, but I shouldn't leave her to find it out by hearsay—if I were you."

"But, Meredith, I haven't an idea what you mean! You seem to be hinting—"

"Should you call it hinting?" Meredith's voice was suave. "I'm giving you good advice. For that's one of the fences you must take for yourself—the duties of a best man don't include breaking the news to the Sophy of the moment. If they did I should scratch. Now shall we change the subject?"

"But, Meredith, Sophy is nothing to me!"

Meredith laughed at him.

"But she is not!" said Evelyn. "Did you believe that? Do the others think it—Hurst, Leslie Wright? Is it the common gossip? It is an insult to Sophy and to me." He sprang out of his chair and stood before Meredith, his eyes flashing in what Meredith considered a very Evelyn-ish display of unnecessary heat. "That poor little girl! Because she lives alone and because I go up to see her now and again, does it follow that there's any beastly connection of that kind between us? I know she went wrong in Paris. But before heaven, since she's been in town, so far as I know the child has kept absolutely straight."

Meredith eyed him long and curiously. "I beg your pardon. I accept your word for it, Eve, of course: at least so far as you're concerned. For Sophy. . . . It's very difficult for a girl of that type to escape from her associations. Once her passions are aroused, a woman generally finds it harder to keep straight than we do. That at least is my experience. And of course there's no question of immaculate virtue in this case; I could name you half a dozen men who were her lovers in Paris; Millerand for one, and for another . . . Never mind that now. But I've always taken for granted that you were her lover here. Why else did she set up house alone in Chelsea? What sort of life is that for a girl like Sophy, accustomed to any amount of excitement and admiration? It seemed obvious that she wasn't really living alone, and there was no one else available but you. But apparently the idea comes on you as a thunderclap! She followed you from Paris, didn't she?"

"She came over when I did. That's not to say she followed me."

"And she camped in Endsleigh Gardens when you were in Victoria Street, and moved her rooms when you moved yours? Upon my soul, Evelyn, you are too innocent for this world! How could you fancy it wouldn't be said? And, for that matter, what on earth does it signify?"

"Because I'm going to be married."

Meredith shrugged his shoulders.

"Besides, and far more, there's Sophy to be considered. It's just this sort of thing that makes it so hard for women to get back their self-respect—to escape, as you said, from bad associations. To my mind, the man who lightly spreads a rumour like this is not much less to blame than the man who originally pushes a girl down into the mire."

He brought the colour into Meredith's cheek.  
"Thanks, Eve!"

"Oh, Meredith, I didn't mean you!" Evelyn exclaimed remorsefully. He dropped back into his chair, the shadow clearing from his eyes. "Of course I know it wasn't you who started the gossip! You repeated it believing it to be true, and that only to me, because you wanted to warn me. It's the other men—Oh, one knows them well enough, the sort of fellows who enjoy inventing these beastly lies. But if anyone repeats it in your hearing do hit him for me, will you? or let me know and I'll hit him myself! I should hate it if it came to Sophy's ears—or Kitty's."

"Kitty's?"

"The girl I'm going to marry."

Meredith sat silent for a minute, then got up and

poured some whisky into a tumbler. "By the by, you've never told me her name," he said, standing with his back to Evelyn and adding his soda water with a sparing hand.

"Miss Dent—Kitty Dent. You've met her, haven't you? She was in London for last season."

"Er—yes, I've met her. I congratulate you."

"I've known her all my life. They live close to Temple Evelyn, and her brother is a great chum of mine, the best I've ever had. You saw him—George Dent—the night he came round to my rooms to tell me of Philip's death."

"I was at Cambridge with him. I know him well, and Miss Dent too. But I never connected her with you. Silly of me, because I knew she lived near Cambridge." One of those odd lapses into which men fall when their minds are riveted on one aspect of a situation: all the links of the chain had lain before him, yet he had never put them together. "Certainly she is very pretty, Evelyn. Yes, you're a lucky devil."

And did not seem to appreciate his luck, Meredith reflected, in a spasm of such grinding rage that he could hardly keep a straight face. Till then he had not known how much he wanted Kitty Dent. Kitty had truly judged him as one of the men who never risk the indignity of a refusal. His icy pride had let her go, believing that he had made some impression on her but not enough, and that six months of rural seclusion would do more for his cause than any pressure he could yet bring to bear. He had meant to go to Cambridgeshire in the spring if she did not appear in town . . . or perhaps earlier, in the winter,

instead of going to hunt with the Whaddon Chase . . . and in one sickening flash after another it was borne in on him that he had never meant to wait till next season. He had been sub-consciously counting the days to the limit he had set himself, November at earliest.

Well, he had waited too long. He had reckoned on the absence of men from the average English country neighbourhood, and the result was that he found himself engaged to be Evelyn's groomsman at Kitty's wedding!

Nine-tenths of Meredith's mind was blinding storm, the tenth was dispassionate enough to reflect that one always wants a woman more when one cannot get her. He had had so many agreeable but inexacting liaisons, lightly formed and lightly broken, that it was not likely he was so much in love as—as he felt as if he were; probably nine-tenths of it was jealousy and irritation and a festering prick of shame. In that case he would get over it the sooner. At all events he had not given himself away! Suppose in his imbecile confidences he had had the fatuity to mention names? He had been on the brink of it: and tremblingly Meredith thanked his stars that he was spared that last appalling and irretrievable faux pas! Yes, it might have been a thousand times worse.

As for the wedding, if one could not get out of it, one could always go through with it: yes, and would do so, sooner than run the faintest risk of betrayal! Meredith knew his own powers of dissimulation, which were considerable, and could trust himself to play out any game without showing his hand. Yes, he would choose Kitty's jewels and arrange her honey-

moon, though at the moment he hated Evelyn as he had never hated anyone before in his life. Arrange her honeymoon! . . . Meredith poured out more whisky and set the glass down empty. Absurd! what he felt was, must be, mainly jealousy of Evelyn and injured pride, though it elected to masquerade as this insufferable ache of desire.

He sauntered back to his chair and dropped his hand again on Evelyn's knee. "Certainly I congratulate you, Eve. To get out of London in November is jolly enough in any case, but to put in one's time at Levanto in such agreeable circumstances is a fate the gods might envy. Claret and roses and Kitty Dent! Happy man."

"Luckier than I deserve," said Evelyn, looking up at Meredith with his wistful eyes. "I'm not half good enough for her. I suppose most men feel that when it comes to the point, but I do wish I weren't such a fool in some ways. I say. . . ." He hesitated. Meredith wondered what was coming next. "About that cheque book of yours. . . .?" finished Evelyn with a graceful diffidence.

So that was what was coming next! Meredith had lent Evelyn small sums from time to time, it was a privilege that most of Evelyn's friends enjoyed: they had all been repaid, or nearly all—Meredith was a better man of business than Evelyn and entered every such transaction in his pocketbook, even down to half a crown for a cab fare—but at all events Evelyn always paid unless he forgot.

"I know you were joking," Evelyn explained: "but if you really wouldn't mind—? It is so beastly to be short of money when you're traveling with a lady."

"How much?"

"A couple of hundred would raise me out of the reach of want."

Meredith drew his hand away with a jerk. A ten pound note now and again one didn't grudge, but to be touched for £200, which one might never see again—! £200? the precise sum that Evelyn proposed to spend on Kitty's jewels! Meredith perceived that her diamonds were to come out of his purse. Born to a keen sense of money values, Evelyn's airy recklessness was incomprehensible to him. He laughed, it was a scene from a musical comedy: even to him, its piquancy was well worth two hundred. Piquancy with a relish of danger!

"Shall we make it guineas?"

Arithmetic was never Evelyn's strong point.

"That's £220, isn't it? Oh, Meredith, you're what I call a friend worth having!"

Rising, Meredith leant his arm along the mantelpiece and dropped his forehead on his hand. Yes, this pleasant glow of condescension was well worth the price! Yet, though his vanity was soothed and his anger had begun to die down, he still felt the deadly weariness that seemed to take all colour out of life: for, lax or not, Evelyn was his friend, and the most unsuspicious fellow on earth. "How young you are, Eve," he said in his indolent voice, just touched with the affectation that was by now a part of his nature, "and, confound you, how very disarming!"

## CHAPTER VII

“**W**HAT a relic of barbarism is a wedding!” Charles Evelyn was saying a fortnight later. “Here we are figged out in the very best war-paint, with enough rice in our hair to make a pudding for a family, and a white satin shoe tied on behind to advertise to a jeering world that we’re going to begin our married life in a rotten foreign hotel where they feed you on pastry and you can’t get a coal fire! I hate pretending to be an agreeable rattle when I feel hangdog. Kate! when you got out of bed this morning, didn’t you wish you were going to be shot?”

“O no,” said Kitty, “I enjoyed it all very much.”

On their expensive and (thanks to Kitty and the best man) faultlessly organised wedding the sun had not shone. It was a mild, grey, sodden November afternoon. “Rain before seven, fine before eleven,” Kitty had said when she awoke to weeping skies; but they had wept without intermission till one o’clock. At two, when she alighted near the church door, their drizzle had subsided into a gloom, warm but penetratingly damp, which reduced the whole landscape to a uniform tinge of dim, dusky brown. There was not a rift in the fawn-coloured marbling of cloud to show where the sun’s grave was; not a breath of wind fluttered the last ivory leaf or two that hung on walnut or lime: only now and again one was detached by its own weight of raindrops, and

fell almost vertically from wet branch into wet meadow grass or weedy stream.

Sombre too the old church with its Perpendicular traceries and faded brickwork, its hatchments that hung over the altar promising “In Coelo Quies,” and its tomb, beloved of Kitty’s childhood, commemorating the virtues of a lady who died of a lingering distemper, resigned to the will of God in spite of the temptations of a great Fortune, at the tender age of twelve. Like the majority of English country churches, it was steeped in the sentiment of the past, and for Kitty on her bridal day the past was nearer than the present—it was almost an oppression: she could remember so many Sundays when insecurely poised on three hassocks in the high Manor Farm pew she had peeped over it for a glimpse of Evelyn’s bronze head, or Philip’s stately height and carven profile, in the even taller pew that bore the Evelyn arms: while winter rains washed the armorial windows, or the sun on June evenings put out the pulpit candleshine.

But, once out of church, no November gloom had been allowed to damp the spirits of the bridal pair—Evelyn correct, cordial, and gay, Kitty serene in sapphires and Limerick lace, distinguished by her rosebloom and her finished air as of a French miniature, incapable of the agitations to which less disciplined brides give way. She had not wept, except two little tears in the vestry, which Selwyn Yarborough said made her “paintable”; he meant perhaps that without them she might have wanted the last softening grace of womanhood. Now, sitting by Evelyn in Meredith’s car on her way to the station and the Calais night mail, and dressed in pale grey cloth and a

tiny chinchilla cap with a grey and silver traveling veil flung over it, she retained her cameo delicacy, her brightness, and her verve.

"I'm sorry if you would really rather have been married at eight o'clock in the morning, but it would have been a horrid scramble and you never would have got up in time. Even Mr. Meredith never would have decanted you at that hour for such a—a—an uncongenial engagement."

"Kitty, have you rouge on?"

"A wee scrap. Can you see it? Dear, dear! and I was so careful over it—I quite thought it wouldn't show."

"It doesn't, only your natural bloom is never the same for two minutes together; you vary more than any other woman I know. You couldn't go two hours without turning either white or pink. Rub it off. You've just promised to obey, so now you can begin."

Kitty, docile, put back her veil and rubbed her cheek with her handkerchief. "It won't come off without water," she said soberly, exhibiting the spotless cambric. "It's the very best rouge."

"For two pins I'd lick it off," said Evelyn. "You'd have to let me if I said you were to, even as Deborah obeyed Abraham. Oh no, I've hit it, give me your little nosewipe." He leant out of the car and dipped it into a wet wayside tangle of clematis and briony, scattering a shower of brilliant drops. "Soap out of your dressing case. . . ." He washed his wife's face all over and firmly: it was none the paler for the removal of her precautionary rouge. "Now Othello's himself again," Evelyn finished, putting Kitty's damp and pink handkerchief into his own pocket. "Pray

what is the fun of taking all this trouble to get married if I can't even make you blush?"

"Eve! Eve!"

"Yes indeed, it is Eve and no mistake," said Evelyn gravely. "Did you think it was George?—I say, Kitty Evelyn, have I been a frightful brute to you to-day? I seem to have neglected you somehow. One goes through such a fuss getting married, one's inclined to overlook the bride. But the next four weeks will be devoted entirely to making amends. I do wish we weren't going to the Riviera all the same. It's so banal: and you can't pretend to be doing anything *but* honeymoon, because no chap would have leisure to go off there in November, unless he were an I. R. or a cot case. Besides, I'm always sick for three days after crossing."

"Well! but it was you who proposed the Riviera—I didn't particularly want to go abroad, not a bit, I like England better. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I didn't propose it. Meredith proposed it. He said it was the proper thing after an orange-blossom show. You none of you objected, so I let it go at that, and he took the tickets for me (yes, I have them in my pocketbook, antedated), and wrote to an hotel. After all I dare say it won't be so bad when we get there."

"But, Eve, don't let's go!"

"Not go?"

"Why should we if we don't want to?"

"Meredith said we were to. Wouldn't it look rather queer if we didn't after all?"

"Queer? My dear child, some one has been putting ideas into your head! When did you ever wait to

think whether a thing was or wasn't 'queer' before?"

"I promised Meredith to get the honeymoon over before I went adrift."

"It isn't going adrift if you take me too," said Kitty. "I didn't propose that I should go to the Riviera and you stay behind!" She gave her clear silvery trill of laughter. "That would be not only queer but dull. But I can't have you feeling bound to do what you don't want to do just because you've married me. Don't let's cross if you're going to be sick; besides, I've never crossed before—I might be sick too!"

"In that case we could be economical, share a basin and halve the tip."

"The baleful influence of matrimony! Oh, when did you ever consider economy before?"

"But there isn't anywhere to go in England except Brighton; and, besides, English hotel pianos are worse than foreign ones. No one can call me faddy but I do prefer the bass and treble to be in the same key."

"You can't expect to find a hotel piano to your liking. If you want to make music you had better go home to Chelsea on the spot." An indefinable shade flitted over Evelyn's face, "Oh, and I believe you do! You haven't touched a piano to speak of since you came to Temple Evelyn." She lifted Evelyn's hands and turned up the finger-tips. "Are they feeling hungry? Poor hands! Evelyn, would there be room for—for me too in Chelsea?"

"Room, oh! oceans of room," his eyes had begun to sparkle: "but, my darling, that's out of the question. When I'm at Chelsea I work all day and all night. That would be so exciting for you, wouldn't

it? No, we'll go to Levanto like good children and you shall have your little holiday, all among the roses and the lilies and the Canterbury bells—”

“Give me the tickets,” said Kitty.

She opened his coat, drew the Aladdin-carpets daintily out of his waistcoat pocket, tore them into four pieces, and tossed them through the window. “Now you can tell Mr. Meredith it wasn't your fault.”

Evelyn, being Evelyn, followed the fragments with a regretful eye. “We should have had ripping weather out there anyhow. It would have been a joy to get away from this confounded rain.”

Kitty laughed again, throwing back her small head and exposing a throat as soft as a child's. “Incorrigible! Will you never, never learn that in this life you can't have your cake and eat it too? Cheer up, we shall have a heavenly time in Chelsea. You can make music all day long while I read or sew, and in the evenings we can put on old clothes and have supper in Soho, or go to a ‘Prom.’ in the two-shilling seats where they won't know you. Wouldn't it be fun to stand in a queue and pay at the door, just like anybody else? Fraser will do for us—he won't approve, but I'm convinced I can get round Fraser. We can ask people in to coffee sometimes—Mr. Hurst, or that handsome painter boy, or any other men you like that won't give us away. And sometimes before breakfast we might hire ponies and ride in the Row. It will be like the Arabian Nights.”

“But you can't really like that so well as the Riviera?”

“The Riviera was banal,” said Kitty serenely. “I felt that myself. This will be a far, far better thing

to do. When it comes out everyone will say 'Just like Kitty—just like Eve.' "

"Hang it!" Evelyn touched the white-rose-petal throat with his finger-tips, "this is a way of going for a honeymoon that takes my fancy."

She brushed him off as if it had been a tickling fly. "Don't! I mayn't be a great Grenadier of a person, but I will not be chucked under the chin. Here's the station. Oh! quick, Eve, the signal's down, get hold of a porter, or shall I? perhaps I'd better. There's the luggage to be labelled, and we do *not* want to celebrate the occasion by missing our train!"

And in their reserved carriage Kitty read her *Telegraph*: produced it from her dressing-case and buried herself in it under Evelyn's nose, and discussed items of news in it that were of common interest, for all the world as if they had been married ten years. Sitting with half-closed eyes and a cigarette between his lips, while the train rattled on through the ever-darkening landscape and lights began to shine, Evelyn tried to make himself believe that he was married at last: that the years of bachelor freedom were over, and his life henceforth was to be shared with the lady opposite. But it was no use, he could not believe it, or at least he could not realise it; he had travelled with Kitty before, and he had smoked while she read a paper: there was no difference. . . . True that on those other occasions they had been expecting to part in an hour or so, whereas now she was on her way to Chelsea, and at Chelsea there would be no *Telegraph* between them . . . but, sufficient unto the hour! He had so inexpressibly dreaded the ordeal of

their foreign journey, with the inevitable gène of its prematurely forced intimacy, that for the moment he could feel nothing but relief.

And then Kitty found his eyes fixed on her, melancholy captive eyes, eternally demanding more of life than it can give; and her own eyelids fell and her face stiffened into a little polite gay mask, under which her valiant spirit shivered in its nakedness, because she could scarcely hope that the mask would continue to deceive him. But the train rolled on, with its pedal-point of grinding wheels under the to and fro throbbing clank of the engine, bringing them every moment nearer to the end of their journey, and still Evelyn remained apparently blind—mercifully blind: life for Kitty Evelyn might continue to be endurable, so long as he was unaware that she loved him.

For that was the secret hidden behind Kitty's mask and her absorption in the *Telegraph*: not a mild wifely tenderness, but one of those overmastering passions that tear human lives to pieces and are to some extent their own justification. Law itself has mercy on a thief who steals bread when he is dying of hunger, and Kitty at the Manor Farm had almost died of her secret hunger of the heart; it was no more than the bare truth that she had enjoyed her adventure in the Hunting Tower; she could have imagined a worse fate than to pass with Evelyn into oblivion of the fever of living. Failing death, she had seized on her chance of marriage! She could not keep alive any longer at the Manor Farm on a letter a month.

But with her ruthless perceptive faculty, always keen, and keenest of all where Evelyn was concerned, she had no delusions about this lover of hers who

was now her husband : she knew that, if she was not content to take much less than she gave, less and less would be given, till in the end she would be nothing more to him than a duty to be performed gracefully. It was no consolation to Kitty to be certain that there would be no failure either in the performance or in the grace. He was incapable of courtesy. He had never been less than courteous to his mother, with whom he never willingly stayed five minutes in the same room. It was in his character to treat his wife in the same fashion, picking up her handkerchief for her and fetching her a cushion on his way to the door. Kitty would rather have been beaten like a fish-hag. Well, it should never come to that, for at the first sign of weariness, or before it, she was prepared to drop back into the terms of friendship, as loose and easy as an old coat ; otherwise she never would have taken the risk of this marriage. And yet it was a risk, for Kitty and for Evelyn too.

How heavy the strain was on Evelyn, Kitty had not even begun to realise, for with all her shrewdness she was unaware of his peculiar bent. He did not love her as she loved him—no : but most men not pre-occupied elsewhere find pleasure in the possession of a pretty and high-spirited woman, and on that half-brutal instinct Kitty, scarlet and pale by turns, relied. She was not vain, but a great many men had admired her, and when Evelyn, in the Hunting Tower, gave her to understand that he was one of them, it never crossed her mind that she was listening to a Quixotic lie. Friendship alone, or passion alone, would have formed an unsafe foundation, but on the two together Kitty saw no reason why, with a few common and ele-

mentary precautions, she should not build her house secure.

And yet it was a risk: of her own danger Kitty had been reckless, but now when they were in the train together she began to realise for the first time that in it Evelyn was irretrievably involved, since the most profound and devoted love cannot stand between its object and the working of natural laws. Marriage never leaves man or woman where it found them. Some change it must bring to Evelyn, however ruthlessly she effaced herself; she might make no demand on him, but life itself would inevitably present its series of little bills, and in one coin or another Evelyn would have to pay. . . . Silence, and the roar of the train, to and fro with its romping excentrics, amid the umber darkness of a moist November night. . . . Ever nearer to the glowing clouds of London and to the end of the journey . . . and in this panic realisation of the imminence of danger, and a danger that she had never bargained for, Mrs. Evelyn clenched her small hands and set her back to the wall. She was a born gambler and high stakes only stiffened her nerve. She was casting a great throw now: all her possessions were risked on it: but it was not a game of pure hazard—much depended on chance, but more on the penetration of her judgment and the firmness of her wrist. Her eyes were on fire as she tossed down the *Telegraph*, which had now served its turn, and stood up to lift her chinchilla scarf from the rack.

"There's the Lea; I know that reach of black water and the line of old houses along it. We shall be in Liverpool Street directly. We had better take a taxi

to Chelsea, drop the luggage, and get some dinner at a restaurant. I shan't need a chaperon!"

"No, thank goodness!"

"How impatient you are of any sort of restraint! So am I. I love my freedom, Eve. You never will take that from me, will you?"

"Never," said Evelyn, feeling magnanimous, although the idea had never entered his head and he did not even know exactly what she meant. As no more did Kitty, for that matter.

"Most men do: but you and I have too much in common. I love to feel that if I chose I need not kiss you. It makes me infinitely more ready to kiss you." She flung her scarf over her slender shoulders. "This is certainly a very easy way of getting married! I had so much rather be going to your rooms than to an hotel."

"So had I," said her husband. She found his arm encircling her and stood still, a little withdrawn figure, dainty, sparkling, and ready to fly. "Kitty," said Evelyn in her ear, "isn't this rather fun?"

"Immense if you won't untidy my hair," said Kitty.

Fortune favours the bold! She was thrilling with triumph when she sprang out on the platform. She had not yet learnt that the dice were loaded.

Fraser was not pleased to see them and made no pretence of it. He had planned to springclean the flat during Evelyn's absence, washing the china, dusting the books, and sorting the accumulated drift of Evelyn's music into cruciform piles; and now it could none of it be done, and here was his new mistress coming in on top of a London season's dirt, "for when Mr. Efelyn iss at home there iss no cleaning done,"

said Fraser coldly, fixing his master with his reproachful, Scottish, blue eyes. "In the circumstances I was justified in hoping for full a fortnight. A body might think he would put up with it for as long as that!"

"Put up with what?" Kitty asked, rather startled.

"Honeymooning, mem," replied Fraser with simplicity.

But when Kitty had retired, as Evelyn said, "a little the worse for wear," and the reproachful Fraser had gone away to his own quarters, his mistress was quite happy in roving round Evelyn's premises and examining with candid boyish curiosity the pretty things they contained. She laughed at the spoils of his French and German and Russian wanderings, the paintings that had scandalised George Dent, and the countless photographs of ladies whom Fraser, if he had not been taken by surprise, would certainly have locked up out of the bride's path. They did not ruffle Kitty. Instinctively she felt that not here her danger lay. Evelyn, his back to the fire that Fraser had hurriedly lighted, watched her flittings with sombre eyes.

"Come out and get some dinner, Kitty, it's after seven o'clock and you must be hungry. You've had no tea."

"No; and I don't remember having any lunch—Oh! yes, I did, though, Mr. Meredith administered chicken and champagne in the library before I changed my dress. He explained that I hadn't eaten anything at the breakfast and that it was part of his duty to produce both of us in good form. He was really rather charming. Where shall we go?"

"The Coin de Paris, it's the only place where you

can get really pretty music, and I must have something to take the taste of the train out of my mouth. It always reminds me of my mother." Kitty looked, for once, entirely blank. "Didn't you know that all trains play tunes?" said Evelyn smiling at her. "The South-Western generally plays a waltz. But the Great Eastern plays a horrible tune that my mother used to play when I was a little boy, a Leech and Tenniel polka tune: Dum, dum, de dum-dum-dum; dum-diddle dum-diddle dum-dum-dum. I've had it ringing in my head ever since. It'll take the Coin de Paris to put it out."

"Oh! the Coin de Paris by all means, in that case," Kitty said, vaguely startled: unlike most of his fellows, Evelyn rarely alluded to the musical side of his life, and well as she knew him she never grew used to the betrayal of his preoccupation with it. "But that means dress, doesn't it?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose so. Don't you want the bother of changing?"

"It won't take me ten minutes if Fraser has brought my trunk up. But—"

"But what?"

"Where shall I change?" said Kitty, composed but scarlet.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" said Evelyn, reddening with a deeper flush. "I'm—I forgot—"

She was the quicker to recover herself. "How quaint! I wonder whether all married couples go through these trying moments? I dare say they do, but, of course, one would always swear one never did. I warn you, Eve, if you ever refer to it I shall deny it."

Evelyn held open the door of his room for her and followed her in. Hastily set to rights by Fraser, it was still a young man's room, airy and rather bare; fencing foils hung crossed on the wall, and under them on an oak shelf stood three or four silver racing cups, some of which Kitty had watched him win at Fenner's. Football and cricket he had forsaken in his eternal fear for his hands, and the boats took up too much time, but he was an exceedingly fleet runner, and in those days lithe as a wand and hard as steel. His body had lost a good deal of its spring by now, Kitty thought, glancing at him from time to time as he stood playing with various objects on the dressing table, while his wife moved about the room taking her evening clothes out of the trunk which Fraser had dutifully brought up and unstrapped. But Evelyn's head was bent. He was not watching Kitty. She wondered what his thoughts were: but it was as well for her that she could not read them. When he had torn to shreds the violets that she had taken out of her coat, and was in the act of breaking her tortoiseshell combs, Kitty came up to him and took them out of his destructive fingers.

"Run away and dress now, Eve. I shan't be long."

He gathered her hands into his own and raised them to his lips. "I'm not brilliant in my new rôle, it appears to me."

"No, dear." The derision in her eyes would have piqued a duller man than Charles Evelyn. "I can't say you are. Any ordinary John Smith would probably shine by contrast. Fortunately in this rôle it isn't necessary for you to be brilliant. Oh dear me, Eve, if I am your wife that doesn't alter the fact that

we've played together since you were in petticoats! You're only shy of me because you feel bound to live up to Mr. Meredith's portrait of the Perfect Bridegroom. But you needn't, because I don't even remotely resemble what Mr. Meredith would consider to be the Perfect Bride. I don't feel anything except the most deadly embarrassment, in fact to be quite frank I don't feel as if you ought to be in here at all. You run away and dress!"

"But, my darling girl—!"

She stamped her foot. "Oh! don't be so conscientious! . . . You wait and see, it'll all come right by and by: you'll feel different when you've had a proper dinner and half a pint of champagne."

"Kitty, of all the thorough-paced little cynics!"

"It isn't I that am cynical: it's the way of the world and the men in it. Lay the blame where it belongs, dear; I dare say His shoulders are broad enough to bear it."

She turned him out. Evelyn went into his dressing room, but it was a long while before he found enough energy to change into his evening clothes. He was frightened: not of Kitty, but of himself and the web into which he had unwittingly walked. There was some devilish element in the situation that he could not cope with or even lay his finger on.

Many a sensitive man marries a woman he does not love because he has fancied himself in love with her till it was too late to retreat. In such an event one puts a good face on the inevitable, hopefully waiting for habit to blunt the sharp edges. But how different it was between Evelyn and Kitty. He had never seen a woman he preferred to her: she never

bored him : her companionship was as loose and easy as an old coat (Kitty's own simile!) : in her delicate keen personality there was no trait that did not enchant his taste, from the fine fair curls of her hair to the tiny foot so sure in the stirrup or on the braeside : she was part of his life and he could not imagine it without her—part of his life, and every fibre in him shrank from taking her into his life ! The deficiency was in him not in her, but it was none the lighter to bear for that.

Long he sat by his open window looking out into the night, and wondering what on earth was the matter with him : whether it was only a nervous disorder, which might pass, or the symptom of some obscure, insidious, horrible trouble of the brain. . . . It had never been so bad, not even in the Hunting Tower ; it had gone off after that and he had not felt it, except once or twice when he woke up to it, and even then it had left him when he struck a light and read a book ; once or twice he had thought of going to see a doctor, but his confusion would have been very great, and characteristically he had put it off and put it off and shut his eyes and run away from his mysterious enemy—and now it had him in its grip. It was agony. With a paralysing sense of shame, an overpowering shyness, a distress that try as he might he felt helpless to conceal, Evelyn faced his married life.

He thought of George Dent and wondered what his brother-in-law would have said or done to him : of Meredith's indolent banter : of Philip with his hard, acquisitive, Masson blood. His cheek burnt at the bare idea of being found out by any one of them,

especially Philip, whose after-dinner talk, when there were no ladies in the room, was occasionally free. He had sickened at it in the old days, but now he half envied the rough strong nature it sprang from.

Or Meredith and his portrait of the Perfect Bridegroom! Meredith had certainly made a Perfect Best Man. Meredith it was who had ordered carriages and bouquets, and tipped the verger, and produced a ring from his pocket at the dreadful moment when it dawned on Evelyn that he hadn't one—and by the by was it Meredith who had paid for that ring? Dear old Meredith, the best of friends! One would have to settle up with him one of these days; luckily there was no hurry. . . .

"Eve's friendship," Meredith was at that moment reflecting with his cynical smile as he sat by the fire in Streets Mews jotting down the day's accounts in his pocketbook, "is apt to be an expensive luxury. Ring: flowers: tips: parson's fee: Kitty's necklace. . . . I wonder if she would have been quite so grateful to Eve for those sapphires if she had known who paid for them? But they looked well on her neck. . . . H'm: rather a stiff price to pay for the doubtful joy of packing those two off to the Riviera together. I wonder if I shall ever see one penny of it again? Lots of men pay their friends and diddle their tradesmen, but Eve . . . How pretty she looked in those sapphires!" He glanced at his watch. "Half past seven: ah well. . . . But I shall see her again in January." He shuddered and dropped his face on his hands with a deep sigh that was almost a groan. "No, no: not Evelyn's wife. . . ."

. . . and hadn't there been some talk at one time of Meredith's admiring Kitty? Again in the darkness Evelyn felt himself reddening. How Meredith would have jeered at him! Meredith was not afraid of life; it had never yet offered him a situation that he could not tackle with his capable strong hands. Evelyn winced: face to face with the situation of tonight, what short work Meredith's hardy manhood would have made of it!

Meantime one was in danger of keeping Kitty waiting. Evelyn rose and stood for a moment by the open window, abandoning himself to the beauty of the glowing darkness of London and the chill of its moist nocturnal breath. Amid many difficulties there stood out one impossibility, that of letting Kitty read his mind. She had not done so yet, he was convinced; she saw that he was shy, but it meant no more to her than a touch of nerves. It must go at that if he died for it. His wife was sensitive and he would rather have shot himself than put her to shame. His own mercurial temperament too would help him to deceive her, for there was often a play of surface fire over its dark seas; he had, yes, he had enjoyed kissing her in the train! And deriving, like Kitty, a certain courage from having his back to the wall, Evelyn shrugged his shoulders and lit the lamp. One could steel oneself to go through with it, since it was inevitable: and perhaps after all Kitty was right, and the privileges of the young husband would be less uncongenial after supper at the *Coin de Paris*!

## CHAPTER VIII

DURING the twelve months before Philip's death Evelyn had reached that happy period of an artist's career when the wind is blowing in his favour; when Press notices are prompt and kind, and people are saying to one another, "Have you heard So-and-So yet?" One of the leading musical journals had published an interview with "Charles Evelyn at Home," a second had analysed his "Art and Personality" under the title of "An English Cortot." He had been beset with invitations professional and social, the latter often very hard to refuse. Dimsdale Smith his agent, a brisk dark man one of whose qualifications was alleged to be that he didn't know one tune from another, had been anxious to fix up an autumn provincial tour guaranteed to bring in a net £1500. Anecdotes about his absence of mind ran through the Personal Columns from Queensland to Singapore, and when, at the *Æolian Hall*, he took his fingers off the keys in the middle of *Barlumi*, Dimsdale Smith said his innocent "O Lord, I can't remember how it goes on!" was worth a dozen posters. He was a popular favourite: one of those spoilt children who can take liberties with their public, which forgave him all shortcomings when he bowed to it with his charming smile, so gay and friendly.

But before the end of March Dimsdale Smith was tearing his curly hair, while Evelyn remained imperviously bland. The provincial tour still hung in the

wind, and even in London Evelyn instead of courting engagements tried to get out of them. He played once in Queen's Hall, attacked with all his old fire an exceedingly brilliant Delius concerto, and was chidden by the critics for quite a little shower of wrong notes in the Largo movement. Evelyn only laughed and said he was out of practice. Since that is not an excuse that a professional musician can afford to offer, people shrugged their shoulders and the tone of criticism began to change. Followed the inevitable question, "Drinks, doesn't he—or is it morphia?"

How unfair it was none knew so well as Kitty, silent spectator of a transformed Evelyn who seemed only anxious to work all day and all night. He was not allowed to do it. As an Evelyn of Temple Evelyn he had mixed all his life in a social set to which mere talent gave no man entry, and he was weak and often let his days go at the mercy of interruptions—chance callers who dropped in for a cigarette and stayed half a morning, cards rained on him and Kitty by old family friends for whom "the Season" was a career. But he would come in at two in the morning and work till he dropped asleep in his chair. Kitty often wondered if she ought to let him do it, but she was too young a wife to dare to interfere. Indolent? George Dent was tough and energetic, but in the longest days of harvest-home she had never seen him exhaust himself so unsparingly. She felt as though she had never known Evelyn before.

Or as though she did not know him now: for he puzzled her. Some fibre in him was steel-hard: she put out her hand, touched it, and drew back, not sure what it was but shivering from that cold contact.

Meredith enlightened her. In town for the season, he was a frequent visitor at their flat, and would sit and put up his eyeglass to stare at Evelyn as if he too were puzzled. But one day, when Evelyn had laconically and ungratefully refused an invitation to the opening day at Hurlingham, Meredith turned towards Kitty with a teasing smile. "No good, Mrs. Evelyn. We can twist nine-tenths of him round our fingers, but there's always a residuum that won't budge. You don't take me? Oh, come, come! But then you're a woman, and Eve is the victim of one of those male follies that women, being the practical sex, never understand. Still you ought to know what it is."

"What what is?" Kitty asked placidly over her knitting needles.

"Art," said Meredith.

It was after midnight, and Meredith in evening dress on his way home from some entertainment unspecified had come up because in passing under their windows he had seen lights burning overhead. He lounged on a sofa sipping a café filtré, Kitty sat on a high-backed chair knitting a tie for Leslie Wright in recompense for a red one which she and her husband had violently taken from him and burnt, and Evelyn in a soft shirt and a white and green blazer stood at the window with his hands in his pockets and his back pointedly turned on the room. Dimsdale Smith, having argued himself into a state of exhaustion, had given Evelyn up and was on his hands and knees under the table looking for Kitty's ball of silk. He came out backward and with a rumpled head. "It isn't anywhere, really, Mrs. Evelyn!" he said piteously.

"It is," said Kitty. "I saw it drop. It must have rolled right along under that bookcase." She could never resist the temptation to torment Dimsdale Smith. Meredith put up his eyeglass to contemplate the dwindling stern which was all that was left visible of Evelyn's *impresario* as he crept back among the legs of the table. It sank flatter and flatter till Dimsdale was entirely prostrate, his cheek on the rug, his arm stretched out and fumbling amid invisible flue . . . Triumph! he came up flushed and dusty, and rubbing his head, but bearing the ball in his hand. "Thank you," said Kitty, tucking it behind her. "You had better go and brush yourself, Dimmie, you're all fluffy."

"Come along and I'll brush you, Hercules," said Evelyn.

He led his friend into the next room, where apparently Dimsdale had to be rubbed down like a horse, for there came out a sound of hissing.

"Do you call that *thing* an artist?" Kitty asked, pointing with a knitting needle over her shoulder.

"Well, what would you call him :" said Meredith, "a business man?"

Kitty laid down her work. She was reluctant to discuss her husband, but she needed advice, for she was anxious, and her own judgment was handicapped by her ignorance of the musical world. Marriage alters the point of view; Evelyn's incompetence in dealing with servants and porters and tradesmen had amused Kitty Dent, but it frightened Kitty Evelyn, who felt that such simplicity however lovable would be out of place among contracts and guarantees! She had to talk to some one, and to whom more confi-

dentially than to Meredith? for Evelyn was most carelessly open about his own affairs, and probably an old friend like Meredith would already have heard all there was to know.

On her own score too she liked and trusted him: liked his obvious liking for Evelyn, and trusted his judgment, so shrewd under its veil of affectation. She trusted Dimmie too, but then he had no influence, whereas Meredith could manage Evelyn if anyone could. She had almost forgotten that Meredith had once admired her. It was so long ago, and what had there ever been in it after all? Nothing: the merest flirtation.

Kitty in her way was as unsuspecting as her husband, but indeed it would have needed a keen eye to penetrate Meredith's mask—when it was a mask; he was so fond of Evelyn and so hopeless of Kitty's loyalty that nine days out of ten the mask was second nature. The tenth day? On the tenth day Meredith simply suffered and did not reflect.

Kitty sighed as she laid down her work. "I wish I knew more about business. Dimmie says you can't—even Evelyn can't—go on taking liberties for ever: that, if you refuse engagements when they're offered, very soon they won't be offered when you want them, and that it's folly to trust to what he calls B. P. memory for a second chance. If that's true it's serious, because after all Eve does want to be successful and to make money—he would hate to be overtaken in any race. At least I used to think so. But sometimes now it seems as if he really didn't care."

"No ambition?"

"No. Last night we went to hear that new young

Jewish pianist that people are making such a fuss over, and Evelyn was quite simply delighted and went up and shook hands with him, and said he only wished he could play the Appassionata like that. But of course that boy doesn't come near Eve when he's in form?" There was a question in her voice. Meredith's eyelids dropped.

"Are you doing me the honour to consult me seriously? Then, frankly, it's an open secret that Evelyn owes some of his success to his personality." In saying so he tasted the pleasure of a deliberate stab. But Kitty only nodded. "He's a brilliant pianist. But not more so than others who aren't half such a draw. Why? because they haven't Evelyn's looks and Smith can't circulate little pars. about the family seat in Cambridgeshire. And of course Eve's little confidences are very effective."

He had risked a snub, but none came. "Thank you," said Kitty soberly. "I can take quinine from a friend. Indeed I wish you would give Evelyn a dose of it! I'm a little worried. I hate to worry him, but I do mistrust both his judgment and my own. I know as little about music as he does about business; meantime one must live, and he can't afford to retire."

"Retire! at his age?"

"It'll soon come to that."

"But what is he doing then? He never was an idler. Why won't he work?"

Kitty glanced at the closed door. "He said I might tell you but not Dimmie. It appears that Dimmie's criticisms get on his nerves. Promise!"

"Silence till death!"

"Writing an opera."

"Oh, my dear friend," said Meredith, dropping his eyeglass, "this is serious!"

"Very," said Kitty drily. "Especially when he sticks fast. Then there are damns and bits of music paper all over the floor. Of course I can't tell if it's any good, and no more can he, apparently—his affection for it seems to fluctuate with the weather and his digestion. But what I principally want to find out is whether there's any money in it! As you know, Eve has been writing music on and off all his life, but he doesn't seem to have made much out of it so far. Having a low, practical mind, as you justly observe, I'd rather he would make hay while the sun shines, and not take to composing till he loses his hair."

"What's it like?"

"From what I've heard it seems to be rather French in style; but I was so beaten and harried for saying that a trio in the Second Act reminded me of the Puck music in Berlioz's *Midsummer Night*, that I have grown shy of expressing an opinion."

"I should like to hear it."

"I should like you to hear it. I do want your criticism, and so I think does Eve; he is so self-distrustful."

"With gentle handling, if we can get rid of Smith, we may induce him to let me look at the score. French, you say? Yes, Eve is French: he hasn't much in common with the modern British group. Oh, by the by, Smith," as Dimsdale returned followed by his grinning host, "have you five minutes to spare? I've written a little song that I want you to place for me. I'll send it in, shall I?" he strolled towards the piano,

"or we might try it over now if Mrs. Evelyn would give us leave—"

Dimsdale Smith made some of his living by placing little songs on a ten per cent basis, but it was no part of the bargain for him to listen while the infatuated composer tried them over—probably over and over—in Dimmie's play-time. He gave a start of alarm. "Oh, I'm awfully sorry, I'd love to, but I can't stop now. Roll it along to-morrow and I'll have a look at it." He was already on his feet. "Good night, Mrs. Evelyn, I must be off. I didn't know it was so late. Thanks so much for letting me drop in in this informal way, it is so jolly knowing you like this. And you will," quite unconsciously he was clasping Kitty's hand, knitting pins and all, "you will use your influence with your husband, won't you? Make him see how important it is, how *fearfully, vitally* necessary, to keep in the very middle of the B. P.'s eye—"

"Yes, Dimmie, I will," said Kitty, smiling up at him tenderly.

"Kitty," said Evelyn, as the door shut on Dimsdale, "you tipped that ball of silk under the bookcase on purpose."

"Oh no I didn't," said Kitty serenely. "It rolled. I've been telling Mr. Meredith about *Clair de Lune*. You said I might. He's promised not to tell Dimmie."

Evelyn incontinently fled. Pursued and captured on the stairs, he was tucked under Meredith's arm and put back into a chair. "My dear friend, where is the score?" Meredith enquired as languidly as if he had never scuffled in his life.

"Over there. Bureau."

It would have been cruelty to comment on his scarlet face, and Meredith contented himself with lifting out the score. He sat down again on the sofa holding it open on his knee. No one spoke. Kitty continued to knit swiftly, Evelyn lay at full length in his low chair, his hands in his pockets, his legs extended and wide apart at the knees. Across the room's hush, nocturnal murmurs of London drifted in at the open window, clang-clang of brougham bells, moan of a siren far off on the river, rumble of hoofs in a brewer's dray. Suddenly Meredith began to whistle an air under his breath: an elfin air, the spirit of moonlight imprisoned in a little cold dancing tune. Evelyn shivered and drew in his legs.

"Shut up!" he said softly, as though the little tune set his teeth on edge.

Meredith turned a leaf, turned back, whistled the little tune again, and put the score down. "I wish you would run it through for me on the piano. Where did you get that tune?"

"Came into my head one day while I was watching Kitty."

"Oh."

Volunteered criticism would have goaded Evelyn into madness. But when none came he was naturally no less annoyed. "Well, why can't you say what you think of it?" he demanded angrily. "What's the use of letting *you* see the score? I thought you called yourself a musical critic!"

"I cannot judge till we've tried it on the piano. For one thing I never was trained to decipher a palimpsest, and I cannot read much more than one bar in three. Your Schrift at the best of times, my dear Evelyn,

suggests the meanderings of an intoxicated pin, and most of this seems to have been produced in a gale of wind and a violent temper." He relented. "It sounds pretty fresh and original."

"Original you call it?"

"So far as I can judge. Rather French in style: certainly far more French than English. I see no trace of Worcester influence." He laughed in Evelyn's vexed face. "No, be at ease: it isn't too French. It is original."

"She said it was borrowed."

"I did not—!"

"You did, you said that trio in Act II was cribbed from Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night*."

"Berlioz's," amended Kitty mildly. "Dearest, if you say what is not true, you will not go to heaven when you die."

"The Lord forbid!" said Evelyn with levity. "I hate a male chorus."

"Peace, Faun!" Meredith interposed. "Where did you pick up your libretto?"

"Wrote it myself."

"Oh, come, come!"

"I did!" said Evelyn, sitting up indignant and amazed. "It's only roughed in, some one else will have to lick it into shape, but, such as it is, it's mine. I took it from one of the *Folies Amoureuses* of Catulle Mendès—a rum little tale about two people who were in love and parted and met again and wished they hadn't."

"*'Il ne faut pas jouer avec la cendre.'* I thought it seemed vaguely familiar. Now I understand what you mean by saying you wrote it yourself. Mrs. Eve-

lyn, what's the odds that if Catulle were alive to hear it he would say he wrote Evelyn's opera?"

"As a matter of fact, what price me?" said Kitty. "I lent him the *Folies*. And it was one of my mother's books, so now where are you?" She rose, stuffing her tie into a silken workbag. "Good night, Mr. Meredith, I'm going to bed. I suppose you and Eve will sit up all night trying over the score on the piano. We've rented the flat below as well now, so it doesn't signify how late we play."

There was a momentary silence, then, "And what about the flat above?" asked Meredith.

"Oh! the flat above seems to like it," said Kitty on her way to the door. "There's only one woman in it. I don't know her, but she looks rather pretty and forlorn. At all events she is delightful about our playing. I met her in the lift one day when Mr. Hurst and Leslie Wright had been warbling *Pinafore* till two in the morning, and apologised, but she said it didn't signify a straw—that she could sleep through any quantity of noise, or if it was Eve playing she loved to lie awake. She said she was used to his music and had missed it horribly while he was away."

"Charming of her," said Meredith. He opened the score on the desk without glancing at Evelyn.

It was to be hoped that Miss Carter had been sincere, for dawn was in the sky before Meredith with a prodigious yawn got up from the piano. He had sat by Evelyn hour after hour, almost continuously flinging over the leaves, often turning back, while Evelyn, tireless, threaded his way through the maze of a full orchestral score, whistling strains for flute or clarinet, humming the solo voice parts under his breath

or nasalising them in his soft falsetto. The fire had gone out and the room had grown cold. Meredith moved to a side table and without formality mixed himself a drink to his liking, set down the empty glass, and turned again to Evelyn. "You won't get that produced in England."

"No, I know I shan't," said Evelyn without hesitation. "Not in my lifetime."

"You might in France or Italy. Dresden would have jumped at it before the war."

"Great nuisance, the war."

"Yes," said Meredith, accepting the point of view without irony. "It did knock things to pieces for Pantaloona and Harlequin. Have you the rest of this in your head? I suppose so, or you wouldn't have let me see what's done."

"Yes: I know what I want and how to get it. If one could only write as fast as one thinks! There's a scene in Act IV I do want to get on to—oh, and a Chorus of Flames in Act V. . . ." His voice died away: his eyes, too brilliant for health in that cold London dawn, dwelt on Meredith without seeing him. The elder man gave an irritated laugh.

"Calm yourself, my dear fellow, there are no ladies present!" Evelyn obviously missed the jibe. He was listening, not to Meredith, but to the harmonies in his own brain. Meredith shook him sharply by the arm. "Come, rouse up—"

"Confound you, Meredith, let me alone!"

He wrenched himself free. Meredith for once was not offended. He mixed a second drink and carried it over to Evelyn, who had gone to the window and flung up the sash. "Take it, it'll do you good. Your

nerves are all on edge. You're drunk with want of sleep, aren't you? and no wonder, after getting through the greater part of four Acts since December! You'll feel better when it's all roughed out on paper. But, my friend, you should go slow; no work of genius however immortal is worth a nervous breakdown."

Evelyn mechanically drank his brandy and soda but paid no other attention to Meredith's warnings: indeed he hardly seemed to hear them. "Do you think Millerand would take it? I'd rather burn the score than hear it badly produced. I should shoot myself in the composer's box. Do you think Millerand would?"

Meredith nodded. "That's the worst of our trade; in painting or sculpture one has control over one's medium, but a musician's always at the mercy of his second fiddle. But I shouldn't wonder. It's pretty good stuff."

"Do you think so—do you?"

No, Evelyn had not much self-confidence; was indeed rather more dependent on another man's approval than a craftsman should be. Meredith shrugged his shoulders. He was not naturally generous, and his instinct was to grudge praise and bestow it the more sparingly in inverse ratio to the apparent need of it. How childishly Evelyn had behaved! scribbling away for dear life at dead of night, till his temper was frayed and his nerves were in fiddle-strings, as if he could not have got on as fast or faster by working from ten till one and from two till four!

"I don't say it's *Prometheus*, or even *Louise!* It's over-written: weak too, shockingly weak in many places. That quartet in Act I might have come out of

*Maritana.* Your orchestration of course is always clever, you picked up the knack of that under old R.-K., but some of the themes—However, I don't forget that it's in the rough, thrown off at top speed and never polished. When it's done I dare say it'll be less reminiscent of Offenbach!"

"Think so?" said Evelyn dully. The light and life and colour had faded out of his face. "Offenbach? I didn't think it was much like Offenbach."

How soon his spirits were dashed! He was a spoilt child no doubt, and too much sugar was not good for him; and yet the change in him made Meredith feel uncomfortable.

"But I'll do my best to smooth your way with Millerand. He's the man for you, no one else would do it such thorough justice." Meredith whistled the delicate melody that foreshadowed the steps of the heroine. "Charming little air that, so fresh and haunting." Evelyn's face had begun to brighten again, and Meredith was glad of it. "How long do you reckon it will take you to finish?"

"Six months."

"Six months during which you won't take any concert engagements? Whew!" Meredith's eye roved round the expensive flat. He was not acquainted with Evelyn's money affairs except so far as they impinged on his own, but it seemed natural to conclude that for a young professional man just married six months' holiday might prove an expensive luxury. "What will Smith say?"

"Dimmie will raise a dust. But Dimmie's not the point." Evelyn gathered up the score, shuffling the loose leaves into place. He handled it as if he loved

it. "This must come first. From what you say it evidently wants a lot more work put into it, even more than I knew. I don't get half enough time for it, you see, nor enough quiet, I'm always being called off by some damned irrelevance. It's all so difficult, working under present conditions. . . ." He checked himself, repressing a sigh. "No, I know it won't pay—Dimmie's old tour would bring in ten times what I shall ever get from *Clair de Lune*. But what concern is it of Dimmie's if I choose to go out into the wilderness?"

"H'm: no." Meredith was longing to put a question. It might pass for an impertinence, but couldn't one trust Charles Evelyn not to detect any dash of curiosity that mingled with friendly regard? "What about Mrs. Evelyn—will she want to go out into the wilderness too?" Evelyn looked up with a start. His wife's name seemed to rouse him at last, and Meredith was the annoyed spectator of a transformation which had taken place once or twice before in his presence, but never as the result of an indiscretion of his own. The careless expansive Bohemian dislimned and in his shoes stood the country squire entrenched in courteous and easy reserve.

"My wife? You must hear her sing one of these days. I never let her perform except before good judges. It's a small little voice, but you would appreciate her style."

Regret, it has been said, is the last grace of good breeding; but Meredith had never apologised in his life. In the war he had acquired an unwelcome Military Cross by sticking to a theoretically untenable position, and his instinct was to defend by attacking,

"Thanks, I should love to. Oh by the by, do I gather that Sophy still has the flat overhead? Last time we met, soon after your marriage, she talked of shifting her quarters, but it struck me then that when it came to the point she would stay on."

"She has stayed on."

"How awkward!"

"Why?"

Meredith shrugged his shoulders. "Do you cut her when you're with your wife?"

Evelyn waited to shut the window and to remind himself that everyone knew Meredith had a queer temper and a rough side to his tongue. The old good-humoured smile was on Evelyn's lips when he turned round. "Thanks most awfully for listening to all my feeble stuff, I never meant to keep you up all night."

Meredith moved towards the stairs. But with his hand on the rail he hesitated. They were old friends, he was genuinely fond of Evelyn, the snub, if it was a snub, had been deserved, and persistently his conscience pricked him for a want of candour in his praise of *Clair de Lune*, that stinted praise that commonly betrays the working of some obscure underground jealousy. Most of his criticisms were true, but what had they left out? "The greatest gift of all, that of life, which the public always recognises." This gift *Clair de Lune* possessed; though it was unequal and full of faults, now dull and now over-written, it was written with a full pen.—All that marriage had done for Evelyn had gone into it—the bad and the good, the interruptions and irritations, the moods of depression and gloom, but also the harrowing of soil long fallow and the upturning of instincts which

when denied other outlet found vent in work.—Was he really such a curmudgeon as to be jealous of Evelyn? Would he have said more, and more warmly, if his secret soul had not persisted in drawing comparisons between the power, the freshness, the fascination of that rough MS., and the deskful of delicate lifeless stuff at home, which his refined taste had first polished out of all inelegance and then condemned for the poverty of the raw material?

A latent generosity in Meredith was ready to meet Evelyn halfway. But Evelyn, white with fatigue and disappointment, had apparently forgotten his existence. Dropping with sleep, one hand already raised to unfasten his collar, he moved towards Kitty's door and softly turned the handle without knocking.

Something in the simplicity and familiarity of that action seemed to take Meredith by the throat. He let himself out of the flat and walked home. A fine rain was falling and the clouds were the colour of smoke. A yellow steam pressed against the windows of his rooms in Streets Mews, so cheerless with their layer of dust and the ashes of last night's fire. Some men have all the luck—*Clair de Lune* and Kitty's love . . . and what on earth had Evelyn ever done to deserve it? Wasn't he even half inclined to regret his marriage? "Hang it," Meredith reflected with a touch of brutality under his amusement, "before going into the wilderness, my friend, you might have paid for those sapphires!"

## CHAPTER IX

ONE warm May night three weeks later Kitty came out of her bedroom between two and three in the morning and softly opened the drawingroom door. She had thrown on one of those Chinese wrappers that remind one of peacock butterflies or stained glass, her feet were bare, and her fair hair hung down her back in two pigtails and made her look like a child. She had altered little since her marriage. There were still no signs of care on her face, and London had not begun to fade her bloom.

She stole through and closed the door behind her. The windows were open and the fresh river-scent of Chelsea breathed in out of a glimmering dusk : it was hardly dawn yet, but there were among the clouds pale fingerings of light, the prelude of dawn to come. In the room it was dark but for a couple of electric candles at the piano where Evelyn was toiling over the score of *Clair de Lune*.

Kitty sat down on the windowsill and waited for him to notice her. But he did not notice her because he never raised his head, and an alarm of fire would hardly have penetrated to his brain through the flood of silent harmony that beat on it :

Music heard is sweet, but sounds unheard  
Are sweeter,

and the strings and harps and clarinets that filled Evelyn's ear were those of the Dance of Flames in his Fourth Act, which was later to become so famous as to be played on barrel-organs and in bar parlours and by the jaded orchestras of fivepenny cinema-shows. It was no wonder that he did not hear the entrance of his wife.

He was still working day and night, at tension: refusing all professional engagements, and social so far as what he called a gross want of moral courage allowed: never willingly leaving the flat unless Kitty or Hurst or Meredith drove him out of it. He was incapable of rudeness in his own house, and when people came to see him he was charming to them, and when his friends laid violent hands on him he yielded, under pressure, with a grateful apologetic smile, for just so long as the pressure was maintained; but when they grew tired or were called away he reverted automatically to the piano. He got to sleep when he could not keep awake, now for four or five hours in the night, now for odd moments by day. It was in April that he suggested, or Kitty suggested—she never knew exactly how it came about—putting up a bed in his dressing room so that his irregularities might not disturb his wife. Kitty acquiesced as she did in all his wishes; which was not going far, for during those months of travail he rarely expressed any wish at all.

He was not irritable, except under criticism, and even Hurst, an apostle of the decent and orderly (Wright's epigram deserved its circulation by its truth at least: "Don't talk to Hurst about temperament. It's a red rag to a John Bull"), had to own

that he seemed able to survive a life which would have killed most men. To Kitty he was uniformly kind and charming. Gossip said it was a household in a thousand—one of those marriages that reassure those who despair of marriage. The only sceptics were Kitty herself and George Dent, who used to frown with a bewildered expression over Kitty's candid, cheerful letters, and the affectionate half-sheets that came now and then from his brother-in-law, scribbled all over, round the sides and across the corners, with saucy vignettes of "the Kitty-wee."

Kitty sat and watched him for a long while. She was a born tease and loved to watch people at unawares—a trick that has for some of us the illicit lure of a private letter that has come innocently into our hands. Evelyn evidently had not one thought to spare from his work. He had dragged up a table to the piano and sat brooding in a crumpled attitude over the score of that famous Fourth Act. He had one leg tucked up under him, his collar and tie were on the floor, and his shirt was unbuttoned at the throat, while the damp waves of hair were going this way and that without trace of a parting. Once, when he had to turn back to Act I and the pages stuck, Kitty saw him first scuffle them over at a rate of impatience which tore their edges, and then facilitate the process by licking his fingers. She smiled: the eternal schoolboy!

The clock struck four, and Evelyn gave a great frank yawn and put his head down on his arm. Kitty's eyes were full of a profound maternal tenderness. Was he going to sleep where he sat? Just like him! but not good for him, and not to be allowed, for she

had some difficult news to break, and this, the interval between knocking off work and falling into bed, was the only hour in the twenty-four when she could fairly count on gaining his undivided attention.

She slipped across the room like a ghost, the Chinese coat half open over the Saxon fairness of her shoulders. Her instinct was to take him in her arms. She curbed it because he disliked any sudden touch, and contented herself with saying his name softly and clearly and in her most commonplace tones: "Evelyn, dear—"

"Good God!" Evelyn leapt to his feet overturning the music stool, "is there *no* peace—?"

There followed a moment of complete stillness during which Kitty stood before him like a figure of marble, not one thread waving in the gilt plait drawn forward over her neck, and then Evelyn came to her and kissed her hand.

"Dear, I'm so desperately sorry! I didn't mean it for you. I was just trying to work out a stiff bit of counterpoint in my head."

"I thought you were asleep."

"Evidently I ought to be! Here's a pretty state of things, isn't it, when the Kitty-wee gets her little velvet paw slapped? Cheer up! quite soon *Clair* will be finished, and then you'll have a husband again, and then in half no time you'll be sighing for the happy days of grass widowhood. Heigho!" He yawned afresh, but discreetly, behind his hand. "What's o'clock? After four? My word, Kitty, what are you doing out of bed at this hour? Go back at once! what would George say?"

"You're not going to work any more?"

"Not to-night. I shall now turn in and sleep like a top. My head is spinning! Seriously, I do begin to feel as if the long strain were telling on me; I *have* worked pretty hard ever since December." Kitty expressed no sympathy. She had never before heard Evelyn complain of his health; he and she had been bred in the same Spartan tradition of ignoring the body so long as one could stand on one's legs, and if he now began to pity himself it could only be by way of taking cover from a more serious admission. She returned to the window and wrapped herself more closely in her coat; the dawn air had no chill in it but Kitty was trembling.

"Don't go yet, I came in to talk to you. At breakfast people will be in and out, and directly after you'll be at the piano again, and you really are no use to anyone when you're once drowned in *Clair de Lune*."

"I'm so sorry," said Evelyn, smiling broadly. "Write a book and call it *The Composer's Wife, or, Repenting at Leisure*. But the sooner I get it done, darling, the sooner I shall be able to return to concert work and bring in the dibs: and we do want the dibs." He sat down by Kitty. "Very badly we do. I had a painful shock to-day. A letter from the bank. It seems I'm overdrawn. There's nothing new in that, I generally am; but the nuisance of it is that they've a new manager *vice* Fenwick retired, and he doesn't seem to want me to overdraw any more! Would be glad if I could, etc., etc. Dashed impudence I call it, considering that we've banked with them ever since they were founded. Someone must have been putting the wind up him."

"How exceedingly trying!"

"It is, because what with death duties and legal expenses I'm run up so short just now. If I could either let or sell Temple Evelyn it would oil the wheels, but it's a bad season, so house agents tell me, for that sort of property: nobody wants to buy a big old-fashioned place now because servants won't stop unless they can have all the modern improvements. So that funds really are low for the minute. In fact I shouldn't have known where to lay my hands on the rent last Lady Day if—but that's neither here nor there."

"You never told me you were so hard up!" said Kitty, startled. "Indeed, Eve, I wish you would have warned me. I would have been more economical if I had only known. Look at that fur coat of mine and those new evening dresses! You said 'Go to Lucille,' so I did, but I could just as well have gone to Kensington, and they ran into a lot of money."

"Your own money, my dear."

"What does that signify? I suppose I am your wife!"

"Yes, adored one: but for all that you are not going to pay my rent out of your allowance from George. Oh, it's only a temporary embarrassment; it'll be all right as soon as I get back to concert work and there's some cash coming in. It was Philip's dying so inopportunely that let me down. Not that I blame Philip—if he could have foreseen what was going to happen I don't doubt he would have made arrangements! It must have been an awful blow to him to reflect that he wasn't leaving enough ready money to pay for his funeral."

"Oh well, I suppose it'll all come right," said Kitty

vaguely. She really did not care enough for the topic to pursue it. Except for an inborn horror of debt, she was indifferent to money, and her solution of a financial difficulty would have been as simple as Evelyn's: his was to borrow, hers to stop spending. Meredith had taken for granted that the shrewd business head was allied to a commercial spirit, but he was wrong, for Kitty would have been quite ready to go out into the wilderness and live on twopence-halfpenny a day; where she drew the line was at running up bills, the bills of an expensive double flat, without the means of paying them. "But never mind that now," she went on, "there's something more serious I want to say to you." She sat looking out of the window, presenting to him her face in profile, delicate, blooming, a trifle stern. "It isn't easy."

"Mon Dieu, I guess!"

"What?"

"You're going to have a baby."

"Should you be glad? It would be a fresh expense."

"Kitty, I'm shocked." Evelyn picked up one of her plaits and wound it round her throat. "Expense is no longer an object. You look such a dear little girly-wirly with your hair down. But I don't call it proper for you to be indulging in such luxuries when you're only half out of the nursery yourself—"

"No, no!" She turned to him, smiling yet wistful. "You've guessed wrong. If you're disappointed I'm sorry, but it's early days yet, and perhaps when—when you come back to me . . . my dearest. . . . It isn't that at all." Evelyn's features showed an indistinct relief, though he was too polite to express it.

"That was a complete sell, darling, but it was your

fault. The mise en scène was ideal." He waved his arm to indicate the breaking dawn, the sepia clouds, the sepia woods of Chelsea. "And you look a little *piano* too, as if you were feeling modest. Well, if it isn't that, what is it?"

"I feel pianissimo. I feel ashamed. I ought to have been more cautious, but somehow I never thought of it." Evelyn looked mute interrogation. "I have been obliged to tell Mr. Meredith not to come here any more," said Kitty soberly.

"Kitty!"

"I am so very sorry and ashamed."

"Do you mean he turned up drunk?" said Evelyn, incredulous. "Edmund Meredith? why, he scarcely ever touches anything stronger than soda-water!"

"My dear Eve, if he had done that I should have told him to go home and go to bed. Why, I've seen George drunk once! No, he had not that excuse."

"But what then—did you have a quarrel with him?"

"You're not quick to understand, are you? He made love to me."

"Made love to you?" Evelyn echoed stupidly.

"You are not under the impression, are you, that no one has ever fallen in love with me but you?—The strange thing is that I never saw it till now: he has been here time after time, when you were in and when you weren't, and I've always liked him so much and trusted him so absolutely! With an innocence which really ought to have disarmed him, I liked him because he was more your friend than mine! But it seems he has been falling, or rather crawling into love with me all this spring. Earlier, too: before we were married. He declares he never recovered from

his little fit of fascination last summer. At all events there was no doubt about it when it came. He was extremely frank."

"He made love to you? Meredith?—When?"

"This afternoon, while you were out with Mr. Hurst. He came in to tea. We were sitting in the window, he was smoking and I was knitting, when without warning . . . I was almost as slow at understanding him as you were at understanding me. But in the end he lost his head and behaved very badly."

"He insulted you? What did he do?"

"Oh! he didn't do anything," said Kitty with a faint shade of irony: "what can a man do in those circumstances? But he said a great deal. No, don't cross-examine me; however wrong it was of him I shall spare his sensitiveness. You would not like it, would you, if you gave yourself away before a woman and she gave you away to another man? All young married women have worries like this now and again, and I never should have said anything about it if it weren't that I was obliged to tell him not to come any more. I was sorry for him and I still am. When he sits down and reviews the scene in cold blood it will be punishment enough."

"So you turned him out? the hound!" said Evelyn. He stood by the open window, his pale face raised as if he liked the wind on it. "The cowardly hound! He deserves to be shot."

"But you don't propose to shoot him, I hope?" said Kitty, startled. In his preoccupation with *Clair de Lune* Evelyn was so careless that she had scarcely expected him to feel any anger at all. She had hoped he would. Even an artist ought to remain jealous

for the honour of his wife! But there seemed to be something deeper than anger working in him; she was perplexed by this white heat of scorn.

"To shoot him? No. . . . What sort of balance does George generally keep at the bank?"

"As low as he can. Why?"

"I owe Meredith two hundred pounds."

"Two hundred pounds!"

"And more. I was so hard up at the time of our marriage."

"You've owed him this sum ever since we were married? What for?"

"Manton's, chiefly. Part of the rent, too, last Lady Day; but Manton's accounted for most of it—the time I took him round to choose your present. He knew I was run up short and he offered to settle for me, sat down and wrote a cheque then and there; said after our years of friendship he should feel hurt if I didn't give him the preference over the Jews." This was not a deliberate gloss. It was what had happened, as seen across the refracting glass of Evelyn's memory. "He made me take it."

Kitty felt a benumbed sensation creeping over her. "Do you mean that it was Mr. Meredith who chose and paid for my sapphires?"

"Rather. That was your price, Kitty."

"I am certain you're wrong," said Kitty in a low voice. She was: fresh from the scene of Meredith's distress and passion, nothing would have made her believe that he had done it on purpose. He had made love to her because he loved her, he had lent Evelyn money because he loved Evelyn; such inconsistencies of conduct are not uncommon, though they wear an

ugly look when held up together to the light of day. But Evelyn did not seem to hear her plea, still less to be moved by it.

"I must get the money to-day. Intolerable!" He glanced at his watch. "Half past four, and there'll be no business doing till ten. Six hours to wait!"

"Are you going to the Jews after all?"

"I must get the money, and at once."

"Won't you use mine? If I telephoned to George he would advance it." He stopped her by a gesture. "But why—why not?"

"What, borrow your money to pay my debt to a hound that has insulted you?"

She was unable to follow his train of thought. "But if it comes to that the sapphires are mine! It is as much my debt as yours. Oh, Eve, I don't think you ever quite realise that I am your wife! Don't go to a money-lender. Let me give it you, or lend it you if you like; you can pay me interest on it if that will content you." He stopped her again.

"Understand once and for all, Kitty, I will not touch your money. I'll settle my own scores."

"Are you going to quarrel with Mr. Meredith?"

"Not till I've paid him."

"You won't make a scene—a scandal?"

"You can be certain that I shall keep your name out of it."

"Are you angry with me?"

"With you? no! why should I be? It isn't your fault."

But if he was not angry he was very, very cold. It was for his own honour that he was jealous, not for hers. The quarrel lay between him and Meredith,

and Kitty was only an outsider. She felt as though a film of ice had formed between them, and relentlessly her young bosom was pressed against it till she was almost dying of the chill of it.

"Perhaps it was, partly. I'm used to a certain amount of admiration; I've had it all my life, even from you till after we were married. Mr. Meredith said I had led him on, and perhaps I did unconsciously show that I liked his pleasant manners and the atmosphere of compliment that he throws round one. I haven't had it from you, Eve, these five months since we were married. You're always charming when you remember my existence, but I believe you forget me as soon as I'm out of the room."

"No, I never forget you," said Evelyn, looking at her strangely.

A film of ice: one must break it or die. Kitty flushed. Moment by moment the silver currents of dawn were beginning to run among the black and brown clouds of night over London. "Eve, come here." He came to her with his swift courtesy. Kitty had risen. "Can't you remember me and forget Mr. Meredith? Oh, Eve, life's too short for quarrelling! Take my money and pay him and let him go. He is frightfully unhappy already, and your repayment will cut him very deep. He'll probably leave England. Let him go! Why should we trouble about a third person—an outsider? We have each other." She opened her coat and drew down Evelyn's head to her breast. "Dear, don't be so restless! You're overtired; you wouldn't be so hot and impatient if you weren't almost worn out for want of sleep. Oh come to me, Eve! can't I make you forget?"

"Don't hold me. . . ." the cry rose to Evelyn's lips, he crushed it down with difficulty. It was long since Kitty had wooed him in this fashion, and with his dangerous talent for living in the present he had hoped she never would again. After the intense mental fatigue of his long travail over *Clair de Lune* the fresh strain tried him almost beyond endurance: he could just bear it, and no more. Response was impossible.

"How white you are!" said Kitty in an altered voice. "Aren't you well?"

"Yes, darling, only fagged out. Too fagged to appreciate my privileges! Not now. . . ." He raised himself out of her arms and mechanically paid her some compliment, the silver coin which was all he had to give in exchange for her gold. Kitty had begun to tremble again. He saw it, and without in the least understanding what he had done tried languidly to satisfy her. It was a degree less difficult whenever he was released from immediate physical contact. "Cover yourself up, my darling, this night air coming in feels chilly. Ought you not to go back to bed now? You're losing all your beauty sleep. Oh, your little bare feet on these polished boards! Kitty, you'll catch a most awful cold, and then George will blame me. Come, put your little paws round my neck and I'll carry you." He lifted her in his arms, still as light and soft as a child, and as pliant, and as rosy, and yet in some indefinable way withdrawn out of his reach. "Do you remember that morning in the Hunting Tower? How long ago it seems! . . . Perhaps I won't have a row with Meredith after all. I expect he couldn't help himself, you're so sweet."

"Are you—are you coming with me?"

"Rather!" He would have given a year of his life to refuse.

"But I would rather not—not now. . . ." She slipped out of his clasp at the threshold of her room and held up a small hand, defending it. "You're so tired: and I'm tired too. And you're so restless when you're tired."

"Just as you like," said Evelyn. He was too tired to be able entirely to conceal the relief he felt under the relaxation of insufferable strain. "Good night, then, my sweet one." He kissed her tenderly; would have kissed her lips, but Kitty turned her head slightly to offer him her cheek. Evelyn in his dumb gratitude laughed as he touched it. "You little shy rosebud, if I forget now and then that I'm your husband, do you ever remember that you're my wife? You embrace me as if we had just got engaged! Kitty, you deserve . . ."

"What?"

"A husband less tired than I am. Heigho!" He stretched himself with another yawn. "Never mind, wait till *Clair's* cleared out of the way and we'll have a second honeymoon." This was a prospect that he could face cheerfully in the remote future: events a month off never troubled Evelyn: anything may happen in a month. "Good night, my sweet."

"Good night, Proteus."

"Hey? What's that?"

"Proteus," said Kitty, shutting the door between them, "was an accomplished amateur actor."

## CHAPTER X

GEORGE DENT missed his sister. He was not the man to be bullied by his servants, and the domestic staff at the Manor Farm continued to make him comfortable partly because he gave them good wages and partly because he had the knack of getting good work out of people; but the house felt quiet, the meals were dull and the evenings long unless he went out to dinner somewhere, and going out to dinner was what he called a fag after a long day in the saddle. Indifferent to the opinion of his neighbours, in the spring after Kitty's marriage he was often to be seen working on the farm in his shirtsleeves, through sun and wind and rain; he loved the land, its labour as well as its fruit; not one of his own ploughmen could drive a straighter furrow than their master.

One May morning he rode down to Bird's Pastures to see how the hay harvest was coming on. It was one of those days of very early summer when the landscape is painted chiefly in the colours of mediocrity, blue and green: a sky of pearl and forget-me-not gleaming over wide acres of soft, springing grass, watered by little brooks that ran and chattered and flashed in the sunshine, so shallow that the wagtails came down to bathe in them, darting arrowy sparkles this way and that with every flirt of their tails. Perfume after perfume, in layers, pervaded the countryside as Dent rode along: spicy in the village full of wallflowers in

cottage gardens: honied almost beyond the pleasure of mortal sense under the ivied wall of an orchard rosy with apple blossom; fresher and fainter beside a field of clover; honied again in open fallows dedicated to

The beanflower's boon,  
And the blackbird's tune,  
And May, and June.

And everywhere in upland and water-meadow the mays were out, the citadel-mays of Cambridgeshire, branches embossed in dense bloom, ramparts and towers of snow.

Dent loved it all. His immediate mission was to rate George Basham, aged fifty-eight, for omitting to oil the new hay-cutter. The elder men among his Midland farm-hands were inclined to mistrust machinery, and consequently to neglect it. He waged a constant war against their indifference, which if his eye were not on them would leave a costly installation uncovered in the yard during a night of rain. Basham, said Dent, would not have thought of asking his horses to work unless they were properly fed; and how could he expect the new mower to get along unless it received equal care? Machinery was just as delicate as horses. Basham touched his straw hat and grinned, privately regarding the new mower as a bag o' tricks and the old mare it had supplanted as a human being . . . and Dent, whose sympathies were secretly with Basham, fell back and trotted off to the upper side of the field to—to inspect the crop, of course: perhaps also to escape from every human

discord and taste the wide lonely sweetness of May-time, but one was not going to acknowledge that weakness even to oneself.

He took off his cap and turned his face, burnt to a beautiful, uniform red bronze, towards the sun. How Kitty would have enjoyed these first warm days! If she had been at home she would have had her hands full in dairy and fowl run, but she would have found time to ride with him on his rounds now and again: and, yes, he would have liked her to be there, a thoroughly sympathetic companion, who would grumble loudly, like him, about Basham, and pretend, also like him, not to love every sight and sound and scent of May in Cambridgeshire. But Kitty was in Chelsea with Evelyn, and having a very good time, no doubt —a much better time than at the Manor Farm; he seemed fond of her, and Lord knew she was fond enough of him. . . .

Then under the sun's eye he saw some one coming across the fields, a woman in a harebell-coloured dress and a wide straw hat: not the kind of woman that would bring Basham a hot lunch tied up in a red handkerchief, nor that other variety, in suède gloves and fringed shoes, irritating yet attractive, that has to be politely shoo'd out of standing hay, but one who walked dutifully up the hedges, chess-board fashion, as Kitty would have done. Yes! and from a long way off her movements reminded him of the familiar small trimness of Kitty. He touched his horse with his heel and cantered towards her.

"Kitty! what's up? Anything wrong?"

Kitty stood by his horse's head, turning her face up to him with a smile: her complexion as white and

pink as ever, her eyes profound and clear. But there was a change in her.

"Good morning, George. They said you were gone to Bird's Pastures so I followed you. I came by the 8.30 from Liverpool Street. How are the crops? The hay looks well, and I saw a lovely show of apple blossom in the orchard on my way down."

"What's wrong?"

"How men jump to conclusions! Mayn't I come and see you now and again? Isn't there room for me?"

Dent got off his horse and began to walk slowly back towards the Manor Farm, drawing Kitty's hand through his arm. On one side of them stretched away a wide hay-meadow, a green tissue inwoven with varnished gold and white and Tyrian dyes, buttercups and daisies and the purple undergrowth of clover: and, on the other, great branches of wild roses broke out between spires of may, while tangled below in an ivy-net celandines darted their gold rays among the purple turrets of ground ivy. Unorthodox farming: but Dent declared that these high Midland hedge-rows were Nature's provision against the eternal torrent of Midland wind. "You may as well tell me the truth now as later," he said soberly but with a friendly pressure of the arm. "Has Eve chucked you?"

"No, dear: I've chucked him."

"Has he been unfaithful to you, Kitty?"

"H'm: what is faith? I do share his heart, but the other lady can't be dragged into a divorce court. You've heard of her before. She's called *Clair de Lune*."

Dent did not enquire what Kitty meant. He walked on in silence, so deep in thought that if Kitty had not deflected him he would have taken a short cut through the garden, without asking himself how Black Beauty, walking patiently at his heels, was to get over the wishing gate under its cut arch of yew. But when they reached the house he turned into his own study, sat down in his own oak chair, lit a pipe, and quietly but firmly pulled his sister on his knee. "Now, Kitty, you go on and tell me all about it. And don't you try to shield Evelyn. If you were to take your Bible oath you wouldn't make me believe that whatever's gone wrong isn't his fault. At the same time I don't suppose he's altogether to blame. He can't always help himself. There's a queer strain in a lot of these old families; one can't exactly call it a deficiency, but it certainly does produce want of balance. Of course I don't know whether there's any definite misconduct this time—anything he could have helped. But for all you look as though butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, my dear, when you're crossed you can be as stubborn as Carter's mule. So that I'm prepared to believe it was six of one and half a dozen of the other. It mostly is when people are married. Now go on and let's have the truth out of you. It'll save time because I mean to have it in the end." Kitty shivered.

"The truth, George, is that my marriage has been all along a mistake. I thought it was an experiment, but now I know it was foredoomed—a foregone conclusion. It wasn't my fault, I did my best; and it wasn't Eve's fault either, he never has been less than perfect in his manner to me—which by the by ought

to have warned me: when people are happily married they aren't eternally on their best behaviour."

"I haven't a notion what you're talking about. Presumably you didn't leave Evelyn because he was polite to you?"

"Since you will have the truth—yes, I did."

Dent looked at her with a bewildered expression. "Hang it, there must be an end hanging out somewhere! Begin at the beginning. When did you go?"

"At eight o'clock this morning. When I left my husband's roof it was to place myself under the protection of my brother. Wasn't that the proper thing to do? You ought to be pleased—as pleased as one can be in such a melancholy situation! I hoped you might have missed your little sister and would be glad to have her back."

"Drop it. This is a bit too serious for your best style of persiflage. When did you make up your mind to go?"

"Last night: no, this morning, between four and five o'clock."

"What did Evelyn say when you told him you were going?"

"I didn't tell him: I went. I shall write to him tonight, but this morning I—I wasn't up to it: it'll be a difficult letter, and I couldn't have got anything on paper then except undignified wormlike writhings. For I do feel like a worm, it's no use pretending I don't! indeed I don't want to pretend before you. I'm not intentionally brazening it out. I'd cry if I could, but I can't." Dent cleared his throat.

"Has he neglected you, Kitty?"

"Oh! shamefully. Works at his old opera all day

and half the night. Scarcely ever comes punctually to meals; neglects all his social duties—won't even return calls with me or take me to church—”

“Kitty, try not to be more of an idiot than you need!”

Kitty slipped from her brother's knee and stood by the open window, her small hands lightly clasped behind her waist, her face in profile but not concealed. What was there to conceal? Her delicate features were as impassive as those of a nymph in a cameo. “It's no use, George: I cannot vivisect my own feelings even to please you, or betray the intimate privacies of our married life. It wouldn't be fair to Evelyn. I can give you the beginning and the end of it in two sentences, and you must be content with them. I won't stay with Evelyn because Evelyn does not love me. That's his only fault—if you can call it a fault—and there's no other reason.”

“Well, I call that a rotten reason,” said Dent.

He too got up and stood with his back to the bare hearth. From the brother and sister, so fond of each other, physically so different, yet akin in that curious family likeness which comes out in expression and movement and texture of mind as well as body, a faint atmosphere of hostility disengaged itself. “I said it was safe to be Evelyn's fault, but if that were all it's yours. What on earth does it signify whether he's in love with you or not? I suppose you mind more because you're in love with him.” He paused: the brutality of this speech struck him after he had uttered it. But facts are facts, and Dent never minced his words. “Still that's all rubbish. Being married hasn't got anything to do with being in love. I never

heard such rubbish. Like a schoolgirl with an album. You had better go back by the next train."

"Not by the next train, not the next after that nor any other train."

"But you can't play fast and loose with a fellow in this way! Do you tell me you went off without even leaving a message for him? Why, he won't know what's become of you!"

"Oh! that will be all right," Kitty explained without perceptible irony. "Fraser will be there to get him his meals. And he'll have my letter to-morrow morning. I doubt if by then he'll have found out I'm gone."

"You're separated?" Dent asked bluntly. "Whose doing was that?"

"Mine. No: Evelyn's." Her hands stiffened as she schooled herself to endurance: it was anguish to have these details torn out of her, but in a breach so serious and permanent, and one in which his own conduct was involved, Dent had a right to examine her. He did so, ruthlessly. "No: he never would have proposed it," Kitty said in her clear, low voice. "But I did, because I saw it would be a relief to him."

"And I suppose you think it'll be a relief to him when he finds you've left him?"

"I'm sure it will."

"You don't know what you're talking about. Men don't feel relieved when their wives go off. No, my girl, they don't: not even when they're sick of them. However badly a man may hate his wife, he don't want other men to know she hated him. What Eve will feel is uncommonly mortified and sore. How do you suppose the gossip will go when this prank of yours comes

out? First of all, that you've run off with another chap. Then when people hear where you are the women will say Eve's been deceiving you with a chorus girl and the men'll say he wasn't man enough to hold you. Think he'll like that?"

"No: but it will be a pinprick compared with the enormous relief of having got rid of me. You must give me credit for a certain amount of intelligence and—and affection. I'm very fond of him. Fond enough to stay with him on any terms, so far as my own preferences go: too fond to inflict myself on him when the tie between us has become an ever-increasing constraint and *gêne*. Try to imagine the torment of having to be eternally polite to your wife! It is a fate that no woman could have the heart to inflict on a young man so easily bored as Evelyn."

"But you knew all along that Evelyn wasn't quite like other men: a queer chap—sensitive—shy—"

"Did you?"

"Lord, yes! haven't we knocked about together all our lives? I know Eve upside down and inside out." He believed it.

"Why didn't you warn me?"

"You've eyes in your head and you've known him as long as I have."

"I can't remember now what I knew or didn't know," Kitty said with a little despairing movement of the hands that touched her brother against his will. "I knew it was an experiment, but I never dreamt it would fail. Don't scold me any more, I'm so tired! I'm sorry you're cross about it. Of course I knew you wouldn't like it, but I hoped you would let me stay with you till the first storm had blown over. But

since you disapprove so strongly I won't drag you into it. I'll go into rooms by myself for the present in some suitable resort, Brighton or the Channel Islands. Only don't discontinue my allowance, there's a dear! because I should make a pitiful governess, and I can't take any more money from Eve."

Dent ignored these suggestions, which perhaps were not seriously meant. That there should be a home for Kitty at the Manor Farm so long as he stayed in it was a law of life and unaffected by fraternal tiffs. He came to her and put his arm round her waist. "Now, Kitty, own up: this is all rot, isn't it? You always were obstinate but you were never silly, and this is too silly for words. There is something behind, isn't there? You can tell me: I'm too fond of you both not to be able to make allowances. These genius chaps with a kink in their temperaments—! You've found him out in a scrape, that's the top and bottom of it, and you're shielding him because you're afraid of me. But I ain't given to violence! Least of all with Eve, because, though he maddens me when I'm not there, face to face with him I'm pretty nearly as weak as you are. It's not as though he weren't the soul of honour! He's excitable, that's all: and some Jezebel has got hold of him. You don't know, old girl, how difficult it often is for a man to break away." He was tenderly stroking Kitty's hair. "Makes you feels such a brute, unkind, and, what's worse, discourteous. And Eve's one of those fanciful, chivalrous chaps . . . You're my sister and I've got to back you, but I couldn't be hard on him. I've done things I was ashamed of myself, you see. . . . It isn't that girl Sophy by any chance, is it?"

"Sophy?"

"The girl that lived in the flat overhead. I saw her the night I went down to break the news of Philip's death."

"You met her in Evelyn's rooms?" Kitty asked after a moment. She had never heard Sophy's name before, but her mind worked swiftly. "But she was not—was she?—living with him then."

"No, there was nothing wrong then; I know that because Eve gave me his word for it. She was with him that night, but not alone; if you remember, I told you there were other men with him. I didn't mention her to you because, if it was straight between them, that was all that signified."

"You certainly are quick at jumping to conclusions! Why should you suspect her?"

Dent did not know. "I don't. She lingered in my mind, that was all. More her manner to Eve than his to her—but I'll guarantee there was nothing in it. All my point is that if it had been her, or anyone like her, you had better by half forgive him. Facts are facts; and she was hot stuff—the sort that carries a man off his feet. There's propinquity too—"

Kitty disengaged herself. "I ought not to listen to you. I've seen her, she still has the rooms overhead; Eve has never mentioned her name to me and I hadn't the faintest idea he knew her, and they could have met over and over again when I was out of the house. But for all that I am as certain of Evelyn's constancy as I am of my own. I am not jealous, George: oh, I wish I were! I'd rather have a living rival than—than *Clair de Lune.*"

Dent laid his firm hands on his sister's shoulders

and looked down into her eyes as if he would have read her very soul. "Is this the truth, Kitty?"

"It is, on my honour."

"That you've left your husband, at a moment's notice, without one syllable of explanation, for no reason on earth but that he's not so fond of you as you are of him?"

"Yes, dear."

"I'm ashamed of you," said Dent. "I thought you had more pride. Better come to lunch now."

## CHAPTER XI

**I**N an immense height of blue air, clear as a diamond, radiant from brim to brim, a hawk hung immovable as if tied by a thread. Under him lay winter, with summer at its foot: foothills all aglow in grass and flowers, and jewelled with steep brooks that ran in one slant of foam from glacier to valley: ravines of birch, and alder, and sweetbriar, breaking down in a cool emerald shadow over water-gleaming rocks; middle heights of wild red and brown cliff, or velvet of fir forest; in every patch of plain, a red-brown hamlet asleep behind sun-shutters under the knees of an apsed and fortified church; but dominant eternally over all, remote as though they belonged to another planet, Polar in black and white while the foothills were Southern in green and gold, the towering frontier between France and Spain—the rampart of the Pyrenees.

The hawk swooped. A thousand feet down he had marked his prey, and fell on it like a stone from his airy citadel. Now there was not a speck in all the blue firmament, through which the eye could look up and up imagining Platonic sphere beyond sphere and almost able to trace them in those miraculous gradations of azure which seemed to deepen rhythmically in layer after layer of light. All the landscape except the black and white Pyrenean chain reflected this light and glowed with it, for France was in high summer and the immense plain from Perpignan to

Bordeaux quivered under a haze of heat; but in mountain and foothill the air was still fresh, it was fiery, saturated in sunshine, yet had in it a sparkle from unsunned snows.

A pastoral country: here a farm and there a farm, linked only by footpaths vagrant over wild hillsides: a population strangely scattered, each family living mainly on the produce of their own plot of soil, and turning wistful eyes towards London or America—those lands paved with gold as the French labourer sees them: meeting one another after Mass, or on festal evenings in the roughly-paven courtyard of some up-land hamlet, where to the tune of an accordion, and by the light of an oil lamp nailed to a plane-tree, the boys and girls danced mazurka or *chaloupe*; doors left unlocked at night, and no hedges to guard the purple treasure of the vineyards, or the silvery olive-groves twisted and bent in every wrinkled branch; here men's lives flowed on in patient simplicity, very near to the earth out of which they sprang.

Lonelier and wilder than any neighbouring dale was the Val d'Évol<sup>1</sup> into which the hawk had dropped. Austerity was the mark of it, the austerity of wine-dark rocks and thin pastures and grey heights that had been left to sleep in the sun since the creation of the world; austerity and solitude and a Pagan harshness of nudity stripped to the very bone. Along it

<sup>1</sup> The places are real places, but their relative situations are altered. All however are within walking distance of the Hotel Sicart at Olette: *prix de pension 20 frs. par jour, cuisine vraiment supérieure.* . . . I wish to put on record that when we reached this inn without warning, at 8.45 p. m. on a pouring night in May, before the season began, Mademoiselle served to us within some twenty minutes a dinner of soup, trout, sweetbreads, veal cutlets, Roquefort cheese, and white wine. . . . It is a grateful memory.

for the sixteen kilometres from Ria there was neither highway nor hamlet, nothing but a rough *corniche* cart track, which forsook the tiny towns beaded on the railway to wind upward into the hills in alternate promontory and bay. Soon the last stripe of tillage faded out, and the last noise of human habitation. Cliffs of rust-red limestone, bare but for an occasional slant of turf, towered on either hand to a height of four or five thousand feet, breaking overhead into peaks dark with mountain-bloom, and underfoot into pale crags washed by a torrent so blanched in the foam of a thousand rapids that it shone like a vein of snow. And midway over it, like a hillside girdle, the cart track went on ever higher and higher, opening out ever fresh glens of violet valley and pale foreheads of crossed and receding cliff, till without warning one came round a bend on the lateral ravine of Évol—a crevice of emerald, a stream of waterfalls, and an inn.

A white building with faded grey sun-shutters, the *café* of Évol stood turning its back on the mountain side, fifteen hundred feet above the torrent in the valley, and raised off the road by a flight of worn stone steps. On either side of the bay that sheltered it a copse of fir trees lifted their straight, dark, and delicate tracery into the morning blue, then came red rock covered with a low growth of cistus and the spires of black hollies, and then, sloping in and out of the brook's precipitous channel, a lawn of silken pasture shadowed by the moister growth of hazel and ash—slender saplings ankle-deep in fine turf thick-sown with mountain pink and wild sweetwilliam and hot-scented purple orchid. It was very early. The sun had not been up for long, and in every patch of

shade the dew lay thick and grey. Only the hawk and the dragonflies and the butterflies were awake: from brim to brim there was no other sign of life to be seen, nor so much as a shepherd's hut to send up its waif of smoke into the stainless air.

At length the inn door opened and a young man, barefoot in white flannel trousers and a white shirt, came out on the flagged terrasse at the top of the stone stair. He stood for a minute sunning himself in sparkle and glow, while gold rays, shooting almost level over the Mediterranean ranges, painted the shadow of a vine trellis on the bare arm and hand thrown up to shield his eyes, then stepping delicately for fear of gorse or thorns took a path which led behind the inn and through the cistus bushes. Where it began to be fledged with living stone he left it for the wet turf, striking straight across to the brook at a spot where it collected and deepened into a pool; and there, after one cursory glance round him to make sure that mountains, valley, and tributary ravine were as empty as ever, flung off his clothes and plunged in.

Exquisite the bubbling chill of the water, fresh from unsunned springs! It was a bath for a nymph: a gush of crystal falling into a bowl of marble, and coiled there in eddying amber between shade and sun, before spilling itself again over a marble lip in a film of glass so clear as to be almost invisible in its flow. From the worn stones all round delicate ferns were growing, and the slender tall shaft of an ash-tree. It was not wide enough to swim in, but when Evelyn stood upright in it the ripples lapped over his chest, while against his thigh a spire of waterweed swayed to and fro, green as moss and almost as impalpable

as a cloud. An immense dragonfly, more brilliant than a lady's fan, alit on a plump stem of grass to watch his toilet. Near by in a miniature tract of marsh grew a plantation of dwarf reeds, every dark spear carrying as if impaled on it a motionless insect no bigger than a pea and mailed in a coat of turquoise. Lizards, running on their tiny brown hands, flickered under stones on the brink when his shadow crossed them, and in the densest foliage of the ash-tree a cicada, with red-brown beetle's body and glassy wings, accompanied him with its monotonous shrill stridulation, *hz-z-z, hz-z-z*, vibrating in a spot of sunshine among the grey, pointed leaves.

Washed clean in the living whirl of the water, he flung himself on the turf to dry. The sun was hot already: soon the moisture that covered his body contracted into separate beads: and soon these too were gone, dried up, exhaled into the blue abyss of air. Evelyn rolled over into the shadow and lay face downward, sensuously aware of the cool contact of scores of tiny green blades, each suave as crumpled silk and hung with its own chill drop; he shivered from head to foot, but he was not cold under his skin: as soon as he began to be so he rolled back into the sun and stretched out his limbs under it, enjoying the mere sensation of nakedness in that vast and burning solitude, where no one ever came unless it were now and again a shepherd or goatherd, heralded far off by the tinkling of bells. "Off, ye lendings," cried Lear when he went out heartbroken into the storm, and it was the same instinct that now made Evelyn court Nature like a lover, because after being forced into too close and feverish contact with other lives it soothed him to

lie on the breast of a chastity inviolate and inviolable, savagely and coldly pure.

He dressed at length and returned to the inn for breakfast, feeling very hungry—he who in Chelsea had had to be coaxed to every meal. He flung the inn door wide open, flung open the shutters (unlike the Pyrenean native, Evelyn was not afraid of the sun), flung open the doors through parlour and kitchen so that the breath of the mountains blew in and out of the house. There was no one in it but himself. Before catching his eye it had stood for years decorated with a fading “PROPRIÉTÉ À VENDRE” notice: an *estaminet* to which custom never came because the building of another road had diverted all traffic except an occasional pack-mule. Monsieur Henri Blanc was only too glad to remove with his family to Olette and be rid of a bad bargain. No one troubled Evelyn; though he kept on his shelves a few litres of the smooth wine of the country, a flagon of cognac, a flagon of *anisette*, a flagon of Byrrh, and some sweet *sirops*, in case a traveller came his way.

There were two living rooms below and two bedrooms above, airy and spacious with their wavy wooden floors and their pale distemper, in spite of small windows deepset in thick walls, and deep alcoves where one was intended to sleep behind curtains out of the way of a draught. The groundfloor furniture, bought in Perpignan or taken over with the house, consisted mainly of wooden chairs and tables and a hanging mahogany clock with an inlaid dial. The kitchen fireplace was a wide brick hearth under an open chimney, where Madame Blanc had dressed savoury meat in a saucepan hung gipsy-fashion from

an iron tripod over a handful of sticks; the parlour possessed one of those immense foreign stoves which burn anything and everything from charcoal to rabbit skins. Evelyn was equally incapable of coping with either of them. He had written for a Primus stove from England and cooked on that. He had not much to cook, in point of fact: once a week a cart from Ria came up to bring him provisions from Ria's one and only shop, and between whiles he made do with Madame Blanc's vegetable garden, and eggs and milk from a farm two miles away.

Coming in glowing from head to foot and famished from his bath, Evelyn could not sit down to breakfast directly. He had to light the Primus first, husbanding his matches because he had forgotten to put any down in his last Ria order, and while a kettle boiled on one extension, and a potful of eggs on the other, he turned to and swept out the parlour with a wet cloth tied over a mop. By the time this job was done his coffee was ready, and he sat on the doorstep to drink it, and to wolf down four eggs and half a loaf of dark warbread and a pat of butter as pure as thick cream; there should have been jam, but that too had been forgotten. There were still gaps in Evelyn's economy, though not so many as a twelvemonth ago; painful experience had taught him not to forget paraffin, bread, or meat, nor yet to fill the Primus brimful of oil and leave the pumprod sticking out, an indiscretion which had more than once produced a magnificent blaze and stunk the house out and all but burnt it down.

And even after breakfast he had to make his bed and tidy his room, fetch water from the stream and

wash up and shave himself, dig and peel potatoes and set them on to boil, and decide between the rival charms of baked rice and semolina; most men would have lunched off cold beef and cheese, but Evelyn had an intemperate passion for milk puddings, and baked himself a large one three or four times a week. He could eat rice-milk nearly raw *faute de mieux*, when, as occasionally happened, the Primus, owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding, sulked and went on strike. Take it by and large there was plenty to do, even on a theory of existence which cooked everything in an earthenware casserole till it broke and then bought a new one (no power on earth would have induced Evelyn to handle an iron pot); for one must eat, and sweep, and wash up, and once a week scrub the floor. And that, Evelyn reflected, is where civilised man labours under a disadvantage. Your primitive savage would not have had to wait till ten o'clock before addressing himself to Evelyn's one reckless imported luxury, a concert grand piano that had come at untold expense by rail and motor lorry all the way from Toulouse; on the other hand the poor Indian, when at length free to sit down before it, would not have been literally trembling with delight as Evelyn was, his eyes lit with desire, his fingers caressing the keys as a man caresses his mistress.

The day wore on. Towards noon the sun drew up out of the melting snows a weft of cloud, an ethereal mosaic patterned into innumerable shell-shaped ripples, which instead of dimming his glory were first transfigured by it into the prismatic brilliance of a halo as bright as a rainbow, and afterwards absorbed without leaving any stain. Later, at sunset, they came

again for an hour, or the low light revealed their unsuspected and swiftly fading presence: mists flying in a garland of vermillion, fairy girls with twisted petticoats and arms lifted sideways in a long dance round the west, while down the very middle of the sky the breast-plume of an osprey, with rosy spine and fringe of fire, lay floating over gentian-blue, sea-blue, amethyst, and gold. . . . These were the events of Evelyn's day.

It was twilight when he shut the piano. Twilight as one reckoned twilight at that height and in those latitudes, ten o'clock by Evelyn's watch but not yet dark, the hollow of the west still green from sunset, the stars twinkling and sparkling with a brilliancy which in England would have threatened frost. He closed the shutters, closed the window, lit a candle, and blew out his lamp; then before going to bed lingered in his open doorway, at the top of the high *perron*, looking up into the immense, ray-strewn, windless vault of a Pyrenean night.

The breath of it was clear and sparkling, yet so mild that in his shirt and trousers Evelyn was quite warm. He rarely wore anything more unless he went down to Ria, when he flung on a blazer and impatiently put his feet into socks and London boots. Now, standing on bare stone, he was barefoot, and liked the crisping chill of it. In all his life Evelyn had never experienced such a glow of health as had come over him in his mountain eyrie. All the countryside for ten miles round knew that a mad Englishman had bought the inn of Évol and was alone in it day and night, far out of earshot of his nearest

neighbour, but Evelyn never locked his door. Nor had he a revolver; nor a stick even, except one cut with his own pocket-knife from a Ria holly. He slept every evening from half past ten till five, deeply, dreamlessly, drenched in repose: such sleep as he had not enjoyed since his childhood.

Lighting a cigarette, he sat down on the doorstep to listen to the noises of the night, so much louder and more distinct than the same noises are by day. All sounds were either a pleasure to him or a pain, from the metallically orchestral whirr of a dynamo to the acid whine of a gnat; and all to-night were pleasure. In a continuous weaving of harmony he could distinguish several different streams; the laughing chatter of the brook behind him, with one deep sob in it where it formed his bathing pool: the roar of the glacier torrent in the valley bottom: the slender and evanescent murmur of a distant cascade: the lisp and chuckle of runnels buried out of sight under a coverture of grass. Then intermittent came the hunting cry of an owl flying among the crags far off under his feet, and the chirp, chirp, chirp of a cricket on the Blancs' cold hearth, and the wire-twanged squeak of a bat, and the rattle of leather wings as it flickered off again, startled to come unexpectedly on this member of the enemy race; and presently a rustling among the cistus bushes hard by—but what that was he could not tell, there are so many small and shy animals that go about their affairs quietly after dark. . . .

And after that, when he had just risen to return to the house, a different sound which was neither brook, nor owl, nor field-rat, nor any other noise of animal life or nature. Evelyn stiffened and stood to

attention, straining his ears, which were naturally very keen. It came again—apparently from a distant winding of the Ria track. Evelyn relit the lamp and came out holding it above his head. "Holà!" he called, standing at the top of the steps. Instantly the cry was repeated, and now very much more clearly, as if the wayfarer had doubled the last bluff: soon footsteps became audible, a long ringing stride, not to be mistaken for the free, flat, soundless tread of a peasant's *espadrilles*. Evelyn continued to stand holding up the lamp, whose light fell over his head and lifted arm. He was blinded by it and could see nothing, not even when the stranger came into the direct circle of its rays. "You've missed your way?" he said in his clear, pure, idiomatic French, the language of Paris and the accent of a musician. "It's a lonely road, and you might easily have had to sleep under the stars. But fortunately I can give you a shake-down for the night—"

The stranger was as much blinded as Evelyn.

"Bon soir. Je ne parle pas beaucoup français. Si ceci est Évol, voulez-vous dire le monsieur anglais qui vive—qui vit ici que je suis ici, s'il vous plaît?"

## CHAPTER XII

EVELYN gave an irrepressible start.  
“George?”

“Hullo, Eve! is that you?”

“Is my wife with you?”

“No, I left her at Perpignan.”

“Oh, you did, did you?” said Evelyn smiling.  
“Well, come in, come in! since you’ve run me to earth,  
I can but make you free of my burrow. Pity you  
never sent word you were coming or I’d have got in a  
beefsteak—Primus and I shine at a beefsteak.”

He held open the door while Dent mounted the steps. “Are you alone here?” Dent asked frowning, his observant eye roving round the parlour and taking note of its bare simplicity. “Very dangerous. Anybody could break down that door. A couple of determined men could rob and murder you and be over the frontier into Spain before the crime was discovered.”

“You have such a rich inventive faculty,” Evelyn remarked, on one knee before the Primus, which he was trying to light, “that you ought to earn your fortune by writing dime novels. If I sat down and thought for a fortnight these ideas would never come into my head, whereas your fertile fancy produces a whole crop of them at five minutes’ notice. Oh! Blow!” In his impatience he had lit the stove too soon, and a gush of yellow flame shot up, volleying smoke, in a hopeful effort to singe his hair. “I always

forget how long you have to go on saying your prayers to this beastly thing before you begin to pump. Do you know anything about a Primus?—You do?—The Lord be praised! Now I really do begin to feel glad to see you. Go on and contend with it, my blue-eyed lad, while I lay the table."

Dent set himself to soothe the little stove's ruffled feelings while Evelyn went about his domestic duties. Dent was tired from a long railway journey in great heat and a long uphill walk from Ria where he had left the train. Ten minutes ago he had been hating Kitty's husband from collar to shoelace, but from the first moment of meeting Evelyn his anger had been miraculously dissipated, as if charmed away by the mere renewal of contact with his old friend. How well the fellow looked, confound him! How alert and active! there were a spring in his step and an elasticity in his movements which he had not possessed in London. He had no business to be cheerful, and yet it was pleasant to find him looking so well; pleasant also to eat the excellent supper that Evelyn set on the table, fried ham and eggs and Roquefort cheese washed down with the white wine of Ronciaulx and crowned with a Bénédictine; and pleasant afterwards to sit on the doorstep and light a pipe, and listen like Evelyn to the mysterious and peaceful murmurs of the night.

But now came a moment which was not so pleasant, and which perhaps Evelyn too would have been glad to defer. He lingered long over the washing up of Dent's plate and tumbler and knife and fork. But he had to come out at length and sit down by his brother-in-law, leaving the door open behind them

and no light but a candle burning in the white and brown parlour. There was no green glow of sunset now. Unshadowed stars triumphed over a deepening hush, through which it seemed one could almost hear the very dew distilling on grass blade and flower petal. An immense moth came sailing by on broad wings freakishly patterned in scarlet and black and grey, their thick down tipped with iridescence as it fluttered in the ray from Evelyn's door. Evelyn fanned it away with his handkerchief, a characteristic action; a law of the universe to which in thirty years he had not grown resigned was Nature's careless and cruel waste of life, and the singed bodies of flies would distract him even from *Clair de Lune*. When the wanderer fluttered back he went in and blew out the candle. Now all was dark but for the dim glow of Dent's pipe. Evelyn returned to his seat on the doorstep. Silently, without turning his head, Dent flung an arm over Evelyn's shoulders.

"It isn't war then?"

"No," said Dent with a heavy sigh, "no. I never can keep it up when I see you, Eve." He straightened himself, sitting easily with knees apart and his free hand dropped between them. "But I haven't felt very warm towards you these thirteen months since you disappeared. What have you been doing with yourself? you haven't been in this outlandish pothouse all the time?"

"Practically. I've lived here for a twelvemonth."

"What, all through the winter?"

"All through the snows; and with no hot water laid on, think o' that now! Primus and I and a charcoal brazier did the trick between us."

Calling to mind the redhot winter temperature of Evelyn's rooms in Chelsea, Dent was confounded. "But why? What do you do with yourself all day?"

"Work at *Clair de Lune*. I've re-written three-quarters of it since I came out here. I sent off a batch of it to Millerand a fortnight ago. He talks of producing it next season in Paris if the rest of it is up to sample. And it will be. It's good work," said Evelyn with simplicity. "Far and away the best thing I've ever done. Meredith said a lot of it was weak and imitative, when he tried it over in town, and so it was, and no wonder; over there one can't hear oneself think. But it's all different now—fresher—stronger. See there." He pointed with his hand to the Pyrenean rampart that loomed up, high above the high cliffs opposite, obliterating the horizon stars. Over one black eastern tower, too steep for snow, too cold for vegetation, every cavern and precipice standing out on it darkly clear as if etched on steel, a profound glow was beginning to be diffused. "Moonrise," said Evelyn.

"The moon . . . peak"

"The moon put forth a little diamond peak."

She did so; a keen spark like a fire on the rocky rim. "I've watched that night after night, and I've tried to put some of the magic of it into my tunes, and I've partly succeeded. Of course not wholly, no one but God the Father ever looked on the work of His hands and saw that it was all good, but *Clair de Lune* is as good as I can make it, now or ever; it'll be putting its magic over people long after I'm in my grave."

And this was the fretful genius who had winced and sulked under Meredith's criticism? Though Dent had not been present at the scene, it had been described for him by Kitty's lively pen. What a change! Evelyn was not shy now nor irritable either; in his mountain eyrie he seemed to have acquired the more mature and serene temper of the artist whose final standard is "his own solitary reperception and ratification of what is fine." Dent felt the change though he could not have defined it.

"You're a strange fellow, Eve."

"Now tell me how you found me."

"I didn't. Meredith found you."

"Edmund Meredith? But I haven't written to him since I left England!"

"No, but he got your address out of that chap Miller-and you were talking about just now. He runs some sort of musical show in Paris, doesn't he?" Evelyn assented smiling. "Well, Meredith was over in Paris a few days ago, and he wrote and told me that he had heard a thing by an anonymous composer which he was absolutely certain was yours, and recently written; it seems he recognised the style, or the tunes: anyhow it was this chap's band that played it, and Meredith suggested that he would be able to give information if I authorised him to bring pressure to bear."

"So he got my address from Millerand, did he? And that is even more singular because Millerand never had it. Not a soul had it till this April, when I had to get in touch with him for *Clair de Lune*; and even then our business was all done through a third party, an agent in town whose discretion I could trust,

or thought I could. What? Oh! no, not Dimsdale Smith—I knew Kitty could wind him round her finger. Someone as close as wax and right out of the track of enquiry—or so I thought; but no doubt Meredith has his own means of getting information.” Evelyn’s tone was dry. “So it was my *Suite Pyrénéenne* that gave me away? I knew there was danger in it, but Millerand was keen on producing it, and Paris seemed pretty safe as you and Kitty never go abroad. I forgot that Meredith was intimate with Millerand. For that matter I forgot the existence of Meredith. Where did you run across him? Kitty knew him but you never did.”

“Haven’t you heard that it was he who rented Temple Evelyn?”

“Meredith rented Temple Evelyn? *Meredith* did?”

“Aren’t you in touch with anyone in England?”

“Remotely. I get letters from my lawyer now and again. They lie at Perpignan, *poste restante*, till I call for them. I had heard that a tenant had turned up, but wished to withhold his name. So long as he paid in advance it was all one to me so I asked no questions. Was it really Meredith? What an extraordinary thing for him to do! Of course Hanmer’s knew who it was. ‘Had a banker’s reference and were prepared to guarantee him—‘a client of unexceptionable standing but who preferred to remain anonymous’, that’s what they wrote. I recollect now that Meredith was on the look out for a place in the country, but it never crossed my mind that he was the unexceptionable gentleman.” Evelyn’s face was dark and vexed, and Dent wondered why his voice stiffened when he pronounced Meredith’s name. But the cloud

lifted, or he flung it off. "And he came to live there? I dare say then you've seen a good deal of him."

"Pretty fair," said Dent. Evelyn watched him keenly, but there was no trace of confusion or second thought in his manner. "Never mind about Meredith now." Dent waited to knock the ashes out of his pipe. "You and I must come to an understanding, Eve."

*"Muy bien.* Ask what you will and don't be afraid of hurting my feelings; there's no spot so insensitive as an old scar."

"I don't know about that," said Dent slowly, "if you rip it open. I don't want to hurt you. I don't even know who was to blame. Unless Kitty had grounds of complaint that she's never disclosed to me . . ." Again he waited. But Evelyn remained silent, a profile impenetrable in starlight under a dark trellising of vine. "Which isn't likely: in fact she gave me her word for your innocence, and I've never known Kitty tell a lie in her life. If you were innocent she had no right to leave you."

"Hear, hear! and I hope you told her so."

Dent resumed, patient, unmoved by Evelyn's levity. "I was cross enough when she turned up at the Manor Farm. But women are fanciful; and Kitty was a young wife, and there are elements of trouble in most marriages. I made sure you and she would come together again after a bit. When I went to Chelsea and found you gone, you could have knocked me down with a feather."

"What a bold and original metaphor! But so all your metaphors are, old George. After you with that match—I forgot to order any in my last Ria cargo,

and there's only half a box to last till Saturday. Primus lives on matches. Phew! Bother these French rockets, the sulphur's gone up my nose." He sneezed, petulantly. "Well, go on. What did you do?"

"Rounded up your bank: but they refused, quite properly, to pass on a client's address. Then I tried the agents who were handling Temple Evelyn, but I soon found that door was locked. You covered your tracks well."

"A private enquiry agent would have run me down in a jiffy."

"Yes, my boy, but Kitty blocked that move. I had no scruples, don't you think it, but she was as stubborn as Carter's mule."

"By the by, there was no child, I suppose?"

"Whose child?"

Evelyn arched his eyebrows. "Mine!"

"Oh!—No," said Dent disconcerted: "was there any likelihood? I hadn't heard—"

"Not so far as I know," said Evelyn with his slow, pleasant laugh. "But these things do happen. What an old bachelor you are, George! or should I say an old maid? Well, well, I won't pretend I was glad when you ran me down." He smiled into Dent's eyes. "But I am uncommonly pleased to see you all the same. Once or twice lately I've had a queer sensation which I think must be what they call feeling lonely; I never had it before, but it was quite painful while it lasted. So I shan't vanish again. Here I am, at your service, for Little Johnny's catechism. And to begin: What is your name? 'Evelyn Charles Evelyn.' Were you faithful to your wife?—I know you must want to ask

me this: you seem uncertain whether Kitty might not lie to shelter me, but I know you won't believe I should lie to shelter myself.—'Yes, I was faithful.' In all our married life I haven't wronged Kitty in act or word: I never had even a thought that was untrue to her. You accept Little Johnny's assurance?"

"Yes," said Dent on a dropped breath and tightening his grip on Evelyn's shoulder.

"Now shall I describe the crisis as Little Johnny saw it? Deuced piquant it was; if it had happened to any other man I should have been amused. My wife kissed me good night at five one morning and fled at eight. Nothing could have happened in the interim and I had no warning. Her letter, which I didn't get till the day after—and, by the by, thanks for your wire: it spared me twenty-four hours of anxiety—her letter when it came wasn't illuminating. You know what was in it?"

"No: she never let me see it."

"I burnt it on the spot, but I can give you the substance of it because it wasn't long and it was damned easy to remember. She wrote: 'I have left you. I have gone home to George and I am not coming back. There is no law that can make me, or if there were I had rather shoot myself. I hope you will be happy. I know you will be glad.'" He did not add that on her dressing table he had found the case containing her sapphires and an even more laconic message: "Please sell these and pay Mr. Meredith. They aren't your gift to me, if they weren't yours to give."

"Kitty wrote like that to you?"

"Definitive, wasn't it?"

"Was she out of her senses?"

"It was lucid enough," said Evelyn drily. "Lucid and uncompromising. When I read it, England didn't seem wide enough to hold the two of us. To be frank, that cinema-touch about the law put me off—it wasn't worthy of Kitty. If there is one principle on earth that I stand for, it's a deep and unswerving regard for personal freedom. Granting that I was insupportable, she needn't have run: she had nothing to fear from me."

"That also I accept."

"Mind, I won't have Kitty rowed. Marriage isn't a unison. It's a duet, and a stiff one; and Kitty tried her hardest to match her darling little pipe to mine. It wasn't her fault if we were out of tune from the beginning. So there must be no fraternising with the enemy, old man; she's your sister, and right or wrong you'll have to stand by her. For I must have made her suffer, and cruelly—I must have been mercilessly blind. I feel this so strongly that if you really were my brother instead of hers, which somehow I often feel as if you were, I shouldn't have tried to justify myself—I should have let judgment go against me by default."

"No fear," said Dent, perfectly understanding his friend's attitude. "I'll back her up through thick and thin. But it was a rotten letter."

He sat silent awhile, meditating on Evelyn's tale. There was a link wanting in it, for Kitty must have had some motive for flight: the explanation that cleared up Evelyn's conduct left hers a darker mystery than before. But the relationship of marriage is so delicate, and its web is interwoven of so many small

and tender filaments, that when it tears no onlooker can ever tell precisely at what point it has given way. "Thank God," Dent reflected, "there's nothing *really* wrong! Of course one can't expect Eve to behave like an ordinary sensible chap." Remembering his anger when he found that Evelyn, thirty hours after Kitty's desertion, had fled in his turn, disappearing like a comet into space, he was glad he had not crossed Evelyn's tracks at once. Time had cooled his judgment and he had come to Évol prepared to hear Evelyn out before bringing up his own heavy guns, and now they were put out of action; Evelyn had behaved boyishly, but some latitude would have been due to any man after reading that letter from a six-months' bride. The shame and distress of the young husband must have been very great.

"What did you do then?"

"I haven't an idea. I recollect taking her note from Fraser and tearing it open to read it, and striking a match to burn it, and scattering the ashes out of my window. After that a blank till my wits came back to me on the deck of a Channel steamer. I had a rough crossing and I was most miserably ill." Evelyn laughed. "Unromantic, wasn't it? But the sickness must have done me good and cleared my head, for I can remember how things began to take shape again bit by bit as they do when one's coming round after an anæsthetic. I'd had a good deal of over-strain all the spring, grinding at *Clair* under difficult conditions, and I suppose I wasn't far off a break-down when this blow came and knocked me silly."

Clear over mountain and valley the moving moon was going up the sky. Fifteen hundred feet below,

the glacier torrent and its border crags lay drenched in gloom: but the cliffs behind stood up striped in great patches of shade and shine like black and white marble, and behind again, flung back by the intervening haze of light into a ghostly distance, height after height of the Pyrenean range stretched out shadowy wings under ineffable lustres. Among the low-grown cistus bushes and in the saplings that overhung Evelyn's tributary stream, every sprig and leaf stood up immovable like filigree, darkly and delicately clear, while the lawns that sloped in and out of its falling channel, short turf sprinkled with the shut buds of flowers, were whitened by a mingling of dew and moonshine. Yet, though it was lighter than many an English winter's day, Dent could not read Evelyn's features, or the melancholy smiling eyes which at once disarmed him by their frankness and baffled him by their reserve. But he had his own barometer: his arm was still over Evelyn and through its firm, warm pressure he was able to maintain communications with the difficult shy nature, last scion of the old stock to which his fathers had sworn fealty. That was a fact Dent never forgot; and he understood facts and knew how to deal with them. Three hundred years ago another George Dent had ridden over Marston Moor knee to knee with Ralph Evelyn, a sober trooper who conceived it his chief military duty to look after his rather rakehelly Captain: and, since benefits conferred form a more lasting tie than benefits received, it was still a Dent's mission to look after an Evelyn and to keep him out of scrapes as well as out of danger. Ralph's sergeant had not scrupled to chide

his officer when Ralph wished to get drunk at inopportune moments.

"It was rotten for you. I can't think what made Kitty write it; she must have had some maggot in her head, because she always was so fond of you—fonder, if anything, than you were of her. No wonder she never let me see it. She knew I never should have let her send it." So much for the sugar coating, and now for the pill. "But all the same, my dear old man, you shouldn't have gone off like that! It looks to me like a misunderstanding, but if it wasn't—if you and Kitty really did come up against some shut door—you ought to have been able to get along on second best. As I said to Kitty, marriage doesn't begin and end with falling in love; if it did there'd be precious few marriages that survived the honeymoon. But the world doesn't come to an end directly two people realise that one of them snores and the other sniffs, which I suppose was about the size of it in your case. It's not as if there'd been no foundation of respect or affection to build up your lives on! The bloom might have got a bit chipped, well, you know what I mean, but there'd have been plenty left to go on on." Dent's voice, deep and musical, always had a soothing effect on Evelyn; from no other lips would he have listened to these ill-expressed, trite, and disconnected moralities.

"And even that isn't all," Dent resumed when Evelyn continued silent. You'd have had children after a bit to bind you together. I know you're not a religious chap, and marriage to you isn't a sacrament. But you do believe in God, don't you?" Evelyn gave an inarticulate assent. He had a faith

of his own, and though he would have been puzzled to define it, and neither churchman nor sceptic would have thought much of it, he found in it all that his spirit needed to rest on—a rule of conduct and a vision of beauty. “And in doing your duty by other people? You wouldn’t say, would you, that a man was entitled to go slap across country for what he wanted without minding riding off other fellows on his way? Well, what I mean is, our lives are all tangled up. You’re not only the individual Charles Evelyn, but your father’s heir, and Philip’s brother, and Kitty’s husband, and the potential father of Kitty’s children. Kitty was built to be a mother of sons. But she won’t have any if you don’t come back to her.”

But still there came no reply from Evelyn. “Will you come down with me to Perpignan,” Dent said presently, “and see Kitty?”

“I shall always be delighted to see Kitty when she wants to see me.”

“—i. e. you’ll come if she asks you. Now I don’t deny, after her letter, that you’ve a right to hold off. But do let’s get beyond the stage of talking about rights and wrongs. You ain’t a Trades Union, old chap! You’re a man, and Kitty’s a woman and your wife, and the best right that gives you is the right to have more sense than she has—and more generosity too, if you come to that. Do do the generous thing, Eve!” But the smile that flitted over Evelyn’s lips was not encouraging. The old fashioned argument missed fire because he had never regarded himself as Kitty’s protector. He, protect Kitty? She needed no protection. She was master of her own spirit and her own fate, to stand or fall by her own firm will.

"Has Kitty sent me any message?"

"No, I don't bring an olive-branch. But she's there at Perpignan and she knows I'm here with you, and isn't that as good as a message? You don't want her to go down on her knees, do you? Little hussy! she always was as proud as Lucifer, and she's come more than halfway to meet you.—Mind, I can't think why she left you. It looks like a genuine misunderstanding that could be cleared up in ten minutes if you came face to face. But, whatever her reason was, I fancy she's begun of late to feel it wasn't good enough. I've seen signs of coming off her high horse. You ain't going to stick on yours, are you, old man? . . . What's at the bottom of nine broken marriages out of ten is selfishness. You never were selfish, but you're a bit too much of an individualist. That personal freedom you're so keen on . . . You were saying just now that your tunes would put their magic over people after you were dead, which means, I take it, that if you write a jolly good March, next time there's a war on it'll be playing fellows into foreign transports and helping them to stick their tails up, like *Tipperary* or *The Girl I left behind me*. Doesn't that prove we're all links in a chain that's for ever passing on? 'No man liveth to himself.' You go back to your wife."

"No, I won't."

Evelyn sprang up flinging off Dent's arm. "Don't press me so hard, George! You've often made me do things I didn't want to do, but I won't do that. I didn't desert Kitty. She deserted me. I will not force myself on her."

"It's your duty, Eve."

"It isn't." He pointed indoors towards the piano where lay the score of *Clair de Lune*. "There's my duty."

"Well, but—Kitty wouldn't meddle with your music, would she?" Dent said, reddening in slow irritation. "Why, you were always at it! Meredith said all that spring you were at it all day and half the night!"

"Meredith said? I've no desire to hear what Meredith said . . . . There now, I haven't been angry since I left England!" He backed away from Dent, throwing up one arm as if to fend him off. "I do wish you'd let me alone! Can't you understand that the job I've got to do is to make music, and I can't do it if you come and upset me like this? Look at all the time you've made me waste to-night! Probably I shan't be able to do a stroke of work to-morrow morning. I'm all out of tune!" There was terror in his eyes now, the wild terror of an unbroken horse when it feels the bit: they turned towards the night, that June night with its heaven of stars,

The mighty marching and the golden burning,  
as if in search of escape from the chains that he had thrown off and which Dent was trying to fasten on him again.

As indeed he was. All his life in London had come back to him, hot days when every street smelt of gas or asphalt, fleeting crowds full of pale faces and avid eyes, the jar of traffic and the trampling of steps, crowded rooms, shops, theatres, callers, and, what was far worse, the remorseless pressure of the second life close at his side, Kitty's quick wits and friendly

sympathy by day, and by night the contact of her beauty, to which he was not at all times indifferent. . . .

Once and again that Saxon fairness of hers had set him on fire. Happy moments for Kitty in her blindness! but most unhappy for Evelyn, who came out of them bewildered and aching. They shamed him because he had never yet reconciled in himself the warring elements of sense and spirit; all he had ever achieved was to narcotise the one while the other rioted. But it was not so with the savage beauty of moon and stars and mountain solitude; in that cold embrace he could lie down and be tranquillised, every nerve in his body and every faculty of his mind drawn into one strong harmony which created harmony. From discord only discord could spring! The artist in Evelyn stood passionately and jealously on guard to defend his work.

"Let me alone, George! Kitty has her freedom, let her keep it, and I'll keep mine. I can't stand that life in town. I—I can't work with other people in the room!"

"Quietly, quietly, Eve!"

"Well, leave me alone, then."

Dent was frightened. Fragments of popular science, to which he had systematically turned a deaf ear, were running in his head—that fellow Nordau and his rotten book, and those addle-headed modern psychological Johnnies that would pop you into an asylum before you knew where you were. He was the more startled because he had never gauged the strain of his own influence. He got up and stood with his hands in his pockets, towering over Evelyn and watch-

ing him with an alarmed, steady eye. "No one's going to make you do anything you don't want to do. Hold on, old man: you've been alone here too long."

"I'm all right when I'm alone. That's gracious, isn't it?" said Evelyn smiling, as with the lightening of the pressure of Dent's strong personality the tension of his own resistance relaxed as well. "So sorry! I'm all right when I'm *let* alone. But go back to Kitty I won't."

"Why did you ever marry her?" Dent asked sadly.

Evelyn was too generous to answer that dangerous question. "Look here, it's all hours and you've had a long journey. You must be dead tired and so am I. Hadn't we better turn in now? There are two rooms overhead and most of the furniture of the house is in the second one. I can find you sheets and a pillow-case, and if you want a blanket you can take a table-cloth out of the press—I never sleep under anything more than a sheet myself, and half the time out of doors. There's no means of washing except the river, unless you like to heat some water on Primus; I do that for shaving but I get my bath in the brook. I'll show you my tub in the morning." He sighed; he had no wish to let Dent or anyone into the secret of his naiad's pool. "If you had warned me I'd have made the place more habitable."

"Would you?" Dent muttered, turning to follow him into the house: "not if I know you!"

"Hey? What's that?"

"You would have decamped, old man. I should have put my hand on an empty nest."

## CHAPTER XIII

EVELYN took Dent upstairs. Boxed between kitchen and parlour, a dark staircase gave an a small landing boxed between two bedroom doors. He did not take Dent into his own room because he was impatient of Dent's presence in the house; he had so loved the solitude of Evol that he felt it profaned by the coming of a second person, especially of an Englishman—and yet he was glad to see Dent too, in a way; he was very fond of George Dent. But he did not offer to show Dent over his domain.

Opening the opposite door, he pushed his friend into a wide, raftered chamber, the walls white, the floor uneven and so full of lumber from other rooms that Dent could scarcely pick his way over it to the bed in one alcove or the massive wooden washstand in the other. Sheets and towels were forthcoming from a press, ice-cold brook water from a bucket in the kitchen; they made the bed between them, Evelyn grumbling because Dent's fingers were all thumbs; Dent produced a toothbrush from his coat pocket, and Evelyn a piece of hard yellow soap with instructions to be sparing in the use of it; Dent, left alone, heard the key turn in Evelyn's lock.

Dent was tickled by this precaution, but it was with a sad heart that he betook himself to bed. He cared little who was to blame, but he did most earnestly wish to find a way out of an impasse which seemed to him intolerable. Here were two people who had

known each other all their lives, bib frock and sailor suit, jersey and Eton jacket, and now after six months of married life they must needs fly apart at a moment's notice—and for what? For nothing! Neither could put finger on a tangible grievance, and yet their life-long friendship, their married tenderness, their solemn vows must all be torn like a cobweb—why? Simply because they could not live together. Sad, absurd, and terribly wrong, was Dent's reflection as he lay down between Madame Blanc's reluctantly surrendered handwoven linen sheets, embroidered with the entwined initials of her maiden and married names, while June moonlight fell like snow over the slope of cistus bushes, green leaf and withering lilac flower, steeply banked up behind his window; but though he saw it all so clearly he had had no power to enforce common sense on Kitty at Perpignan, nor now on Evelyn—though against this gipsy life of Evelyn's every sane instinct in him rebelled. Now, in high summer, for a fanciful romantic chap like Evelyn the remote and wild loveliness of Évol might have a charm; but what must it have been in winter, or when "the storm of the swallow" massed its drifted snows against the door? Who but a madman would willingly endure the arctic cold, the gales, the terrifying solitude of those interminable nights?

Yet Dent next morning found himself on the road for Perpignan, his mission unaccomplished. Evelyn was up first and had set breakfast going before he roused his brother-in-law; over their coffee and eggs, and the fretfulness of Primus, which according to Evelyn had got out of bed the wrong side, there was no opportunity for serious discussion (Evelyn saw to

that) ; and as soon as breakfast was over it seemed to be taken for granted that he would return to Perpignan. Evelyn offered to stroll with him as far as Ria. Sixteen kilometres down hill and as many back, with not a mile of smooth or level going in the twenty : it amazed Dent that Evelyn should make light of such a walk. His pace too was startling, it was all Dent could do to keep up with him. Their start in the early morning was touched with a chill, the sun before they got to Ria was burning like a furnace; attired in a wide and disreputable straw hat, thin flannels, and a cotton shirt, Evelyn remained indifferent to either.

But when they came in sight of Ria Dent resolutely pulled up. "If you don't mind, Eve, we'll call ten minutes' halt. I can't talk at this pace." He sat down on a wayside stone and mopped his brow, while Evelyn, his hat tipped to the back of his head, stood before him like a saint in a halo, leaning on his holly stick. At their feet the Évol valley dropped down to meet the main valley, torrent falling into torrent through heights clothed in ash and lime and silver birch, and low green lawns where from dawn till twilight butterflies hovered like rich tropical flowers come alive and dancing in the sun. Runnels diverted from the main stream and led along slender half-natural aqueducts, their water fleeting in loop below silver loop down foot-wide channels between banks of flowery turf, kept all these grassy slopes, even in June, as green and cool as April. Far up the main valley-head the brilliant snows of a late spring lingered on more than one dark peak, and out of them, from the high frontier-citadel that Vauban built for his master the great Louis, one of Napoleon's roads came down

under cliff and precipice and between crossed profiles of naked rock towards the sultry plains of Perpignan. Ria itself was full of river-murmurs : a tiny and sleepy old French town, white and golden houses stretched out on a hillside under a firwood, and a church with a spire of open ironwork telling every hour twice over to an irregular cobbled *Place* under rows of shady plane trees. Dent was near enough to it to distinguish every steep roof and painted wall, and the green of sunshutters, and the stripes of black velvet that were shadows, and the twinkle of bead portières swinging over cool doorways, and the trellised gardens, and the pink, blue, and green washing hung out in them and fluttering for sun and wind to dry.

It was a landscape less wild and austere than Evol, but intensely Southern ; water-fresh even under the torrid June sunshine, and glowing with the most burning contrasts of moist colour. There was room in it for the urbane civilisation of France : for the Mairie's gilt staff and tricolour flag, and for the long glitter of a steel curve on the railway, and for the throb, throb of a stationary engine, which whistled to itself from time to time in the preoccupied and meditative manner characteristic of Continental trains.

"But have you anything fresh to say?" said Evelyn. "I haven't." Nor had Dent, but that did not prevent him from saying it. He went over his old ground, while Evelyn stared wearily at the fleshy limbs of a cactus and listened to the lute-note of a nightingale in a Ria garden full of roses and quarantaines and green-clustered vines. But in the end Dent had a surprise for him after all.

"It's no good, old fellow," Evelyn said, holding out

his hand. "I'm glad to have seen you, and you know now where to find me; if I move I'll send you my address." He sighed, feeling an immense disinclination to give anyone his address; there was no denying that Dent's coming had brushed some of the bloom from his peach. "My love to Kitty."

"I'll give no such message," said Dent roughly. "Come and give it yourself if you want to." Harboured anger broke out at last, and he dragged his hand away. "Of all the careless, cold-blooded—! Haven't you any manhood in you?"

Evelyn glanced at the sun. He rarely carried a watch at Évol. "Hadn't you better be getting on? It must be close on one o'clock and the train goes at the hour. It isn't always nice for a girl as young as Kitty to be staying alone at a French inn."

"She's not alone."

"Well, even with a maid—"

"Maid, she hasn't any maid. Meredith's there."

Dent was surprised to find that it cost him an effort to say these words, and that they lingered in the air as if they required an explanation. He glanced sharply at his brother-in-law. Evelyn was all polite attention. Yet it irked Dent to find that he could not divest his manner of a shade of constraint. Why? He knew not: he had never expected to feel impelled to apologise. Perhaps it was because he had not happened to mention Meredith the night before, so that it was like letting slip a confession. . . . A confession, nonsense! the most natural thing in the world.

"He offered to come with us because neither Kitty nor I knew our way about, not having been out of England before. I don't speak much French; and

you can't get a Cook's tour—not up here you can't—and I never can get the hang of these foreign timetables." Evelyn's eyes were dancing.

"So you engaged Meredith for a courier? Happy thought! I'm sure he'd make a very good one." He threw back his head and laughed out. "And he stayed with Kitty while you came on after me? Happy Meredith! No, no," as Dent started, "that's a joke, and rather a rotten one. I do honestly call it a topping idea! *Comme vous dites, George, vous ne parlez pas beaucoup français*, and the Lord knows where you might have fetched up without the admirable Edmund to look after you. Still, if I were you, I'd run back to Perpignan now."

"If—if you don't like it, why don't you come too?"

"Dear fellow! that might look as if I didn't like it."

"Oh, you idiot!" Dent faced him, very hot, rather red, his square shoulders held back with their old military set. What right had Evelyn to put him in the wrong? Dent angry, once in ten years, was formidable: but Dent merely out of temper was as impatient and indiscreet as a schoolboy. "Well, if you won't, don't blame anybody but yourself if some one else nips in that has more guts than you have, and wipes your eye."

"The postscript of a lady's letter!" smiled Evelyn. He too was angry by now, but he did not show it except by a touch of polite frost in his voice. "But I'm afraid my trust in Kitty is incorrigible. Give my love to Edmund, will you?"

But he was angry. He trusted Kitty, but he did not trust Meredith; he had not forgotten Meredith's lapse

from the code that bids a man respect the wife of a friend who owes him money, and reluctantly he wondered how Kitty came to forget it. Was that quite fair dealing either by him or by her brother? Dent, one might be sure, knew nothing of that lapse—had he done so he would have shut his door on Meredith. Kitty then was keeping Meredith's secret. Good! so far Evelyn went with her, holding that a man's follies are better forgotten. But if she kept a secret from Dent she was in honour bound to respect Dent's principles. She ought not to have placed him innocently in a false position. His oldfashioned and strict rules might be defied, but they should not have been evaded. And reluctantly Evelyn found himself condemning Kitty—she ought to have been more careful.

On his own account Evelyn was not alarmed. His faith in his wife was too firm; he would scarcely have believed her own word against her perfect purity. The stars might fall, but not Kitty Dent! (It was as Kitty Dent that he thought of her nine times out of ten.) But he was offended: his pride was stung. Evelyn possessed no historic sense, would have sold Temple Evelyn without a pang, and after one moment of irritation did not even resent the news that Meredith was his tenant, but his moral delicacy was fastidious in a high degree. It was rarely touched, but Kitty had power to touch it. She had done so when he learnt from her of his betrayal by a man to whom he was under an obligation. The hours had seemed long to him till he could clear that debt; it was four in the morning when he heard of it, and his cheque was in Meredith's hands by noon. This “chastity of honour, that feels a stain like a wound.”

felt itself stained by Kitty's coming with Meredith to Perpignan. People are so quick to think evil! And even if one could afford to turn a deaf ear to the world's misjudgment—as who can? Few of the reckless, and fewer of the wise—there was one person whom it was exceedingly dangerous to mislead, and that was Meredith himself. And in slow still anger Evelyn turned back towards Évol: Kitty should have been more careful of that one trust she still held for him—an honourable name.

But when Ria was left behind, and forsaking even the mule-track—itself lonely enough and hard to follow, as Dent had found the night before—he plunged into a mere thread of path over the hills, he soon began to feel soothed again, as the last faint wail of the train died at a bend of the valley, and the peace of those great upland solitudes shut him in. Ria glowed in green and gold, in lawns and flowery orchards: but Ria was soon far away: high mountains enfolded him in the sweep of austere wings, wine-dark, streaked with snow: longer than the road, and steeper, his path went up and down, now fledged with living stone, now forcing him to wet his feet in the ford of a brook, now going all ways in a pasture strewn with boulders mantled in wild maidenhair, while pink under their grey shadow the sweetwilliams lifted their tiny starry heads. By one lonely pool, clear as a diamond in its cup of marble, Evelyn undressed to cool his limbs in its rippling water. Why not? He was tired after the long tramp of fifteen or twenty miles; and there were no spectators except the brown lizards and the sapphire dragonflies that hung poised over him on their whirring wings like an incarnate

flame. When the sun had dried him he put on his clothes again and plunged into a fir forest, a dimness of sepia shadows on a red pavement; then down into a defile where dawn came at ten and gloom at half past three; and thence up to a *col* from whose rocky top, over peak after peak, crossed like the waves of a purple sea, one could discern a June-blue rim of the sea's self, that eternal summer-blue of the Mediterranean.

And soon after that he saw far off but clear, a toy on the vast sunset-reddened mountain-side, the inn of Évol which was now his home. Yes, it was his home again now Dent had gone: and oh the peace of the high sierras, the brimming cup of solitude! It had never tasted so sweet to Evelyn as to-day when Dent's coming had for a moment broken its delicious monotony.

The sun had set when he came down his own ravine and his own slope of cistus bushes. No one was in sight on the cart track, nor had he met anyone during the last five miles except a couple of Catalan lads who wished him good night in their harsh, half-Spanish dialect as they ran on to their own *métairie*. He had had nothing to eat since breakfast except a lump of bread and cheese and a handful of figs, and he was hungry and tired, but not beyond that prickling glow of fatigue which makes it exceedingly pleasant to sit down to a large meal. There is a happy temper proper to eighteen, and rarely prolonged after four and twenty, when one never remembers that one has a body, unless the cisterns overflow in sheer riot of the joy of life. Evelyn was thirty, but to-night he was near enough to that puppy condition to come down the steep hillside at a run, and leap the brook in a splash

of spray, and vault a stone wall into the yard which had originally enclosed Madame Blanc's pig. His door stood open, it had been open all day; the only thing Evelyn ever locked up was the MS. of *Clair de Lune*. He ran up the steps into the parlour—and stopped: stopped dead, his fingertips and the muscles of his chest tingling, and his hair stiffening like the coat of a frightened dog. In the dark of the shuttered parlour a motionless figure waited for him: it was in white from head to foot, tall, straight, and featureless as if it wore a mask or a shroud.

"What—?" Evelyn began, and could not go on. He was frightened to his very soul, with the fear that comes recurrent like the pain of a scald: a horrible shock, a numbing arrest, and then a fresh heartshake of panic when he remembered that there was not another house within two miles of him. But his reaction was as rapid as his fear. It had to be mastered or it would have mastered him: and though every nerve in him crawled and shrank he forced himself to go on and touch the vague shape.

"Good God! It's a woman!"

She pushed up her veil. "Say, Charles, what did you take me for—a ghost?"

"Sophy!" Evelyn articulated with difficulty. His fear was gone as if it had never existed, but his astonishment was profound. No ghost could have surprised him more than this apparition of Miss Carter, at nightfall, in his remote mountain eyrie.

"Sophy! is it really you?"

"Looks like me, doesn't it?" said Sophy with her carefree laugh.

Pulling off her glove, she put her bare hand into

Evelyn's and held up her face. "Kiss me. I haven't seen you for over a year and I've come a long way to see you. Jolly well the least you can do is to kiss me."

Evelyn yielded. The sensation was strange: her lips burnt. He had not felt the slightest desire to kiss her, but it would have been churlish to refuse, and in some puzzling way that fevered yet fresh and soft touch gave him pleasure. He stood back and stared at her in profound curiosity, while Sophy sat down again in the wooden armchair out of which she had got up to meet him. Now that his eyes were accustomed to the gloom of indoors, he saw that there was really nothing remarkable in her toilette. She wore a white dress, and over it a long white motor cloak and veiled hood: white boots, white stockings, thick white suède gloves that wrinkled on her arm. Her clothes were probably French, but apart from their colour—and he remembered that Sophy had always been fond of wearing white—there was in them no incongruous association of the Boulevards: no dis-harmony between them and the rough surroundings of an Évol inn. She carried no bracelet nor ring, nor even a brooch at her throat, and the thick silken folds fell plainly round a figure which had always been as slim and straight as a boy's; even her white suède boots were boyishly strong and thick-soled.

"But, Sophy, how did you get here?"

"'Came up in a farm cart from Ria. Lord, what a road! I thought the rocks would come down on top of me. All the way up I said to the mountains '*'Don't fall on us!'*'"

"You came on purpose to see me?" Evelyn brushed back his hair as if his head needed clearing. "My dear

girl, how very charming of you! But you can't stay here, you know. Yes, of course I'm pleased to see you—rather so—as pleased as Punch! But there's absolutely no accommodation for ladies. Why on earth didn't you let me know you were coming? You're my second unexpected visitor in twenty-four hours, and my brain is reeling under the shock. I haven't a thing in the house to feed you on but eggs. If you had only written!"

"I did write to tell you about Millerand."

"I never had it—"

"No, because I never stuck it in the post. I wrote it and I folded it and put a seal upon it—and then I chucked it into my bureau and came off in a hurry. If Fifine finds it she'll post it, and you'll get it, and it'll tell you I'm going to a Queen's Hall concert tonight, but I'm not. I'm here. I couldn't wait. Not one single second longer, except to go and see Millerand on my way through Paris, and that was a bit of an effort, I can tell you. Who was your other friend?"

"George Dent, my brother-in-law. He slept here last night and ate up the last of my bacon. By Jove, it would have been funny if you had run into him!" Evelyn chuckled; but he soon grew grave again. "Sophy, I am so attired in wonder that I can't be polite. You did not come over to admire the scenery, did you? What on earth do you want?"

"You."

"Me?"

"Just you. No, you didn't know, did you? and I never meant to tell you. 'Dare say I never should have if you hadn't started writing to me about Millerand. That woke it all up again just when I thought

I was getting over it, so I collapsed and came off to find you. Come here." Evelyn, who had been sitting on the edge of the table swinging one foot, slid off it and approached her. "Kneel down," said Sophy. She put her arms round his neck as he dropped on one knee. "Oh! how good that feels! I've waited so long for it. . . . I'll go away again as soon as you like. I know you aren't fond of me. You aren't ever fond of women, are you? some men are like that. I'll go to-morrow if you like, but I just had to come. D'you mind?"

"Little Sophy. . . !"

"You aren't angry with me?"

"No, but I'm not—I can't—"

"Lord, as if I didn't know that!" She laughed, pulling down his head on her shoulder. "There, there, don't you be shy—there's nothing in me for a man to feel shy about. You don't have to treat me with any ceremony. I expect Meredith told you as much as that, didn't he? he knows all there is to know, and that's a good lot. I've had a lot of lovers. I'm only a guttersnipe out of a French studio. I'm just dirt really, and that's the way you can treat me if you like. Oh, I do love the feel of you!"

"May I ask you one question?"

She had wound her arms under his arms, and under his cheek he could feel the rise and fall of her breath. "Don't I keep telling you you can do as you like? D'you think I've got any pride left in me—or any other little fads? Fire away."

"Was Meredith your lover?"

"Yes—my first, years ago in Paris, when I was a girl. He didn't behave well to me, Edmund didn't.

Isn't that ugly English? when I'm excited I forget to talk like a lady."

And all the while she was flinging these confessions at Evelyn, with her strange fiery recklessness, she retained in externals her old modest grace, her finished delicacy of dress and pose and bearing, and the refined soft voice to which her French breeding had given a tinge of foreign charm. Still on one knee before her, Evelyn raised himself and held her away. "Sophy, you're not to say things like that. I won't have it!"

She uttered a little laugh of delight. "Give a man an inch and— But you do look so awfully well, Charles! quite different from the way you used to look in town. It was too much for you, all that London racket, I shouldn't have let you do it if I'd been your wife. You ought to have lived in the country where you could get along with your old ops. without being bothered. You used to look so tired and delicate and jumpy, especially of evenings; you didn't sleep well, did you? But now you look as if you slept like a top and lived on beefsteak and beer! Well there, you can't have it both ways—you wouldn't like it if your wife knew as much about men as I do. Anyhow you've got a place that suits you now!"

"It's the heavenly solitude—" Evelyn began, and checked himself, flushing; but Sophy only screwed up her features into a fleeting grimace.

"Well, of all the rude—! No, bless you, I don't mind: I never spoil anybody's solitude. I'm not spoiling yours, am I? No more than a fly on the windowpane. You don't feel a bit the less alone because I'm here."

"Honestly, I feel as if I were in a dream," said Evelyn slowly. "All this may be familiar to you, but it's absolute news to me. You're not playing off an elaborate hoax, are you? No? Well, it's a queer world. What on earth made you take a fancy to me, little Sophy? I don't deserve your kindness." He rose and stood looking down at Sophy, his hands in his pockets; it was true that he felt at ease before her, though he ought to have felt shy.

For it was evidently true that she loved him, and with a love that made no demands on him; and if there is one atmosphere which more than any other sets a man at ease it is that of a love like Sophy's, shameless and contented. She asked no questions, required no sacrifice, held up no code of morality or even of manners: he was free to follow his own inclinations, as free as if he had been alone. The strange thing was that he felt as free to leave her as to take her. He perceived that she never would refuse him anything, and yet she gave him, strongly and strangely, the impression of one who would be as well or better pleased if no more were asked than she had already given.

"People are often kinder to me than I deserve," said Evelyn between humour and sadness. "But why were you?"

She fingered his sleeve. "Nothing on but that thin shirt! Aren't you cold? It's pretty near night. Put on your coat." He had left it flung over the back of a chair when he went to Ria, and Sophy caught it up and came behind him. "Put it on." Evelyn slipped his arms into it. "That's better," said Sophy, buttoning it for him like a nursemaid. "Men never remem-

ber to take proper care of themselves. But you do look ever so much better than you used to. You're getting quite stout!" She felt his ribs. "Fat, I call it."

"Look here, that tickles—drop it! And I'm not fat either, I'm in topping form," Evelyn's tone was indignant. "How long have you been here?"

"Since five o'clock in the afternoon. I thought you never were going to turn up!"

"What, and no tea? You poor, wretched infant, you must be famished! And weren't you frightened out of your little wits, to be up here all alone in these trackless solitudes when it grew dark?"

"Well, I was, rather. Do they have wolves in the Pyrenees now? Oh, not even in winter? Well, that's what the man said in Ria, but you never know. It's just the sort of place where they would have wolves. And there are wild boars and snakes, he said so. I was afraid to stop out of doors because of them, and I didn't like it much indoors because a roomful of furniture always makes me feel like seeing ghosts. If I ever do see one it'll be the finish of me. You thought I was one, didn't you, when you came in? You made me jump too, giving such a start."

Evelyn had begun to lay the table, and Sophy rose to help him, taking the cloth from his hand and shaking it out and pulling it even and smoothing it down with more care than its rather tumbled condition deserved. "No, I took you for one of those unpleasant objects that appear to people to warn them they're going to die within a twelvemonth, you know the style of thing, horrid, Scottish, coffined-looking bogies with veiled eyes. That motor hood of yours looked

just like a winding sheet drawn up over your—Hallo, what is it now?"

Sophy with a little shriek had clapped her hand over his lips. "You be quiet! I tell you ghosts give me the creeps," she said, recovering herself with a visible effort. "Lots of things do: I'm an awful coward. Most girls like me are. But I've always been afraid of the dark, all my life, even before . . . and of nasty, wild, uncanny-looking scenery, too. I was funky coming up in the cart, this place is so awfully lonely and stern; and it gets worse after sunset. Of course it really is as steep as a roof, if you once started to roll down off that road you wouldn't ever fetch up till you got to the bottom, and then what was left of you would be drowned, but it isn't that. I do hate the dark, I just can't stand it. Not so much when it's really black and you can't see anything at all—what's worst is those half-lights when there are beastly shadows in the corner of the room."

This confession touched Evelyn, himself not always valiant, and accustomed to be outdone in cool daring by Kitty. He lit the lamp. "Let's chivy the ghosts and the shadows away."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of anything now you're here!" said Sophy.

## CHAPTER XIV

BUT all the while they sat at supper together, drinking coffee and eating boiled eggs and bread and butter (much the same fare, less the bacon and the Bénédictine, as had been set before George Dent), Evelyn's mind was occupied with the insoluble problem that Sophy's presence offered him. Bit by bit her story grew clear to him, a simple story, bewildering only to his want of vanity. This strange love, pure in essence, had been at his service for years, though he had never known of it; during the winter of his life with Kitty it had survived the fiery pangs of jealousy; during twelve months of separation and silence it had lain self-enfolded in a bitter patience, rather gathering than losing force apparently by constant dreaming over the beloved image, till when Evelyn gave her the clue she had seized on her way of escape. Evelyn wondered now why he had given it her. But it had seemed a very simple, a very natural thing to do.

At the time when Evelyn came out to Évol, all the money he had on him was the balance of the sum which he had raised in Fetter Lane to repay his debt to Meredith. The timely letting of Temple Evelyn, on terms of a year's rent—and a heavy rent—in advance, had enabled him to get clear of the Jews and establish himself and his piano in Monsieur Blanc's inn, but there remained the rent of his Chelsea flat to be found, and an allowance to be paid through his

lawyers into his wife's account. He would sooner have shot himself than leave Kitty dependent on her brother. He would as soon have sold her sapphires. It was therefore not many months before he began to want money.

How to get it without returning to life was the difficulty; and then it was that after long rumination he remembered Sophy. To give his address to Dimsdale Smith was probably tantamount to giving it to Kitty; his bank and his lawyers were safe but as musical agents incompetent; of the men of his acquaintance, some were lazy and others indiscreet. But Sophy was as close as wax, knew Millerand, had the etiquette of professional Paris at her fingertips, and would always take any quantity of trouble for a well-deserving friend. "Dear Sophy," such was the informal style of Evelyn's letter to her, "will you see if Millerand would care to produce the enclosed Suite? It's jolly good and just the sort of stuff he's always looking for. Tell him I didn't forget to give his old lutes a chance in the *Source qui tombe sur un gazon fleuri*. Sell it outright, get the best terms out of him you can, and pay the cheque into my bank, but don't give him or anyone my address, there's a dear girl. I know you'll do this for E. C. E."

This was in the April after Evelyn's disappearance. The production of his Suite, rushed through by forced marches, was the most notable event of the close of Millerand's musical season. It had set the composer once more safely on his financial legs, for Sophy was a shrewd hand at a bargain, but he was not sure whether Millerand's cheque had not been dearly bought at the price of Sophy's coming to Évol.

For when the agreement had been signed and the royalty advance paid down (Sophy taking French leave to negotiate on a sounder basis than parting with his copyright), and when further tentative and delicate overtures for the production of *Clair de Lune* had been carried as far as the high contracting parties (Sophy and Millerand) considered mutually safe (in view of their both being such extremely downy birds, and Evelyn so shy), Sophy had simply packed a suitcase and come off without reflection or delay. "I just *had* to see you," she explained, fondling Evelyn's hair. The very force and naïveté of her love, together with his own guiltlessness, saved Evelyn from discomfort. She made him feel sad and occasionally silly but never awkward. He was at ease with her as he had never been with Kitty; and his honest distress was shot with an irrepressible thrill of gratified vanity, for Sophy, even though when excited she sometimes lapsed from the King's English, was not one of those women who weary men to whom they drop the handkerchief. And yet what was he to do with her? For he did not love her.

No, he did not love her: all her young slenderness and grace were at his mercy, yet neither her beauty nor her love quickened in him one pulse of desire. Indeed what she did rouse when she put her arms round his neck was the protective instinct. Vainly his mind argued that a girl like Sophy could not desire protection and would not know what to do with it; instinct, deeper than reason, pierced to a purity of spirit that does sometimes underlie irregularity of life. Doubtless Sophy would not have put up any defence against him, and yet her embrace felt

half maternal and more than half innocent. But all the more for that, if he did not intend to profit by it, her presence at Évol was a mad indiscretion and a gratuitous insult to his wife. When he remembered the pledges that he had given to George Dent, Evelyn's face grew hot. Yet he could not turn her out into the night! He was guiltless to the point of fatuity, but that would not save him from being ludicrously compromised if any hint of Sophy's presence got about.

Sophy herself tackled the knot. She lit a cigarette and sat back in her chair, one knee swinging over the other, her narrow ivory hands folded idle in her lap. "Well, Charles, what are you in such a brown study for? Bothering about me, eh?" She blew out a mouthful of smoke. "I never ought to have come, ought I? And the worst of it is I'm not a bit sorry! I just *had* to come. But I'll go to-morrow if you like. 'Can't very well go to-night."

"This place is so awfully rough for a lady," Evelyn apologised. He felt rude and ungrateful and not a little absurd. How forcibly Meredith would have handled such a situation! "If I'd only known you were coming—!"

"Ah! what then?" said Sophy. She laughed. "Never mind what then. That's one of those inconvenient questions that sensible fellows like me never ask. But you are a queer chap, aren't you now? It's a case of Get-thee-behind-me, isn't it? Don't you worry, because it doesn't worry me, I rather like it. 'Makes you seem so different from all the others. Only I should rather like to know why. Have you got dandy moral principles?'"

"No!" said Evelyn violently, as if the imputation had been an insult. Sophy laughed again and arched her eyebrows at him, or rather slanted them: she had a trick of raising their inner corners which gave her an enigmatic, Japanese air.

"Loyalty to your wife then? But that's queer too! Most men don't care a hang: so long as their wives don't know."

Evelyn wondered whether most men would have let Sophy speak to them of their wives. But he was not offended—a result no doubt of his want of moral principle. "No, it isn't that either. There's no credit in it, dear. It's a—a temperamental idiosyncracy." As he said it he realised that he had never before put his scruples into form. Doing so was a relief: though he knew not why.

"Lovely long words," murmured Sophy. "But I do understand. You're not keen on women, are you? worse luck for us when we're donkeys enough to be keen on you! Never mind. Only you must give me houseroom for to-night—anything will do, I'm not faddy; when I was in Paris after maman died, and had nowhere to go, our old concierge and his wife took me in and we all three shared one room for a long time. They were on one side of a curtain and I was on the other. It didn't worry me, except that he used to spit a good deal in the early mornings. But you don't spit, do you? You're very refined."

"Don't laugh at me," said Evelyn humbly. "I can't help it."

"I don't want you to be any different from what you are. . . . It's all right, I'll move on to-morrow, honour bright I will! Not but what I do wish you'd

let me stay a day or two. No one would be a penny the worse or the wiser; and perhaps I shall never see you again."

"I'd like you to stay a month," said Evelyn with difficulty. "You never get in my way; and you could do my cooking too, which would save me no end of trouble! It would be jolly to have some soup again, and tarts and other puddings besides tapioca and rice. But all the same I can't keep you, Sophy. You'll have to go: not to-morrow, because you can't walk all the way to Ria, but the day after, Saturday, when they bring up my week's rations. You'll have to go back in the carrier's cart. I'm so sorry, dear! But George Dent's still at Perpignan, and—and my wife's with him." Sophy uttered a small "Oh!" of profound amazement and dismay. "He came here last night and went away again this morning early. Odd, isn't it, two people turning up within twenty-four hours when I haven't seen a soul for a year? but that's the way things always happen. And of course it would be safe to happen directly I came to life again. By the way, I'm rather curious to find out how they got my address. You haven't betrayed it, have you?" She shook her head. "Not by accident? No, I never thought you would. You're sure Millerand never had it?"

"Certain sure. Why, it was only yesterday he was at me for it! I stayed three days in Paris on my way out on purpose to see him about you and *Clair de Lune*, and he was as keen as mustard, trying all dodges to get it out of me: said people had been asking him for it, and anyway he preferred to deal with his principal direct: you bet he does—he knows I'm a

better man of business than you are! No, wherever Mr. Dent got it, it wasn't out of Millerand. No, and I don't think it could have been out of me at all, because no one's ever connected me with you—why should they? No one's ever asked me for it except Millerand, and once, ages ago, Edmund Meredith: and I told him I didn't know any more than the man in the moon, because that was soon after you went and you hadn't written to me then."

Evelyn was in the act of lighting a second cigarette. He laid it down. "Meredith asked for my address soon after I left? Why—why should he think you knew it?"

"He was always kidding me about you," Sophy explained. Her voice was unresentful. "Pretending to believe. . . . But he didn't, not really—that's only Edmund's chaff. Anyhow I soon let him see I hadn't it. I let him see I wished I had."

"Suppose by any odd chance he found out recently, from Millerand, that you had it now: suppose he was the 'people' that Millerand said had been bothering him: if he came round for it to Chelsea after you left, could he have got it from Fifine?"

"How should she know it? I never told her, nor I never left your letters lying about. I always carried them—on me," she blushed, and Evelyn glanced away.

"The label on your suitcase?"

"It was only labelled to an hotel in Paris. You can't register through from London to any place south of Paris on the Midi line; you can on some lines but not on that one. No, the only address Fifine had was Poste Restante, Perpignan, for my own letters. I was jolly careful not to let slip anything

about Evol. I don't see how he could have got it: unless—" Her face changed swiftly.

"Unless what?"

"Unless he went and rummaged in my bureau and found that letter I wrote you and never posted. Lord! it was silly of me to leave it there. I never thought of that!"

"Why on earth did you leave it when you were coming out here in person? Why didn't you tear it up?"

"Because it had a clean stamp on and I meant to take it off with hot water when I got home." Evelyn opened his eyes. If he had been reduced to his last sou he would not have preserved an old envelope for the sake of steaming off a threepenny stamp. "I hate wasting stamps," said Sophy defiantly, scenting derision. "Everybody's got their pet economy, and stamps are mine. It's not as if there'd been any danger, that I could see. How should anyone come to me for your address? No one knew I had it except Millerand, and he wouldn't do a thing like that. But Edmund might."

"Rummage in your desk and read your letters? No, Sophy!"

She nodded. "Not read it: but read the envelope, oh yes. And Fifine would let him. She's been with me for years. She knows. When you've been . . . like that . . . with a man, you don't seem to care much what he does, any more than if it were his wife's desk." But nothing on earth would have induced Evelyn to open one of Kitty's drawers, and his face was as usual the candid index of his thoughts. "Oh! well, perhaps you wouldn't do it," Sophy conceded

with a faint shrug. "But that's your dandy principles again. Edmund knows better."

Evelyn picked up his cigarette, lit it, and smoked for a few moments in silence. He knew that Meredith had gone to Millerand for his address, and the two were old cronies: what more likely than that Meredith should have wormed out of Millerand the sex and name of Evelyn's London agent? In the twinkling eyes of that stout and genial cynic of the Boulevards, such a mystery would have been a true Polichinelle's secret. Then Meredith would have tried on Sophy, or, failing Sophy, on Joséphine, every wile of which he was master. But he never would have gone the length of searching Sophy's bureau. If it really was in Sophy's flat that he had found his clue, it could only have been by some unlucky fluke: and gently Evelyn reflected that after such a life as she had led one must not blame poor Sophy if sometimes she failed to distinguish between what men do and what they don't do. He looked up and found Sophy's eyes on him, mournfully amused.

"No, I don't do Edmund justice, do I? He's really no end honourable and straight. . . . Say, Charles, Mrs. Evelyn oughtn't to let you go round by yourself. I wouldn't if I were your wife. . . . Read what you're thinking? of course I can! It's my trade to read men's faces, at least it used to be, and that's not the sort of trade one forgets. I'm always doing it. I do it in trains and trams and any old where, sometimes I wish I could stop doing it but I can't. It's just as if people were made of glass. Lord, I do get so tired of seeing inside them! and always the same old thing, at least when they look at me. Not

you. You're different. That's why I liked you all along." She stretched out her arms to him—and then let them fall again. "No—sit where you are." She rose herself and went to the window, propping her elbows on its high sill and her chin on her doubled fists. "Don't come any nearer. Oh, what shiny stars! Say, Charles: I don't want to bore you, but I'd like you to know it wasn't altogether my fault the first time. Oh, we always say that! But it was true of me: it often is true. D'you mind listening?"

"Go on, dear: tell me all you will."

"He said he'd marry me. I was only seventeen, and—he really was the first: though of course he didn't believe that, because I was only a model, a bit of Paris mud. I dare say he thought he was about the twenty-first. But he wasn't. You see my father was an officer in the Royal Navy, and my mother—well, she wasn't exactly married to him, but it was as good as a marriage to her. After he died she kept a pension, not much of a place it wasn't, I mean not a swell place, but perfectly respectable—she was most particular about that. It wasn't till after she died too, and the place was sold, and most of the money seemed to get muddled away, it was then I got into such low water and began sitting for Tennant. Madame Bigorre, that was our old concierge's wife that took me in, her sister used to do Tennant's charring, and she put me up to it. . . . Well, how could *he* tell? A figure model! Of course some of them do keep respectable, but that's what Englishmen never seem to understand. Oh, there were a lot of excuses to be made for him! But still he didn't ought—he ought not to have said he'd marry me. But Meredith

is like that, you can't trust him when it's a woman. Poor devil! he's paying for it now."

Evelyn remained very still. He was recalling a conversation of more than eighteen months ago in Meredith's rooms. "I could name you half a dozen men who were her lovers in Paris. . . ." Perhaps after all Meredith really had bribed Joséphine and ransacked Sophy's bureau! To take advantage of Sophy's friendless youth was, even in Evelyn's eyes, a cruel but not an uncommon misdeed, but to pelt her with mud afterwards was one that he shrank from characterising, since Meredith had been his friend. And now he was at Perpignan with Kitty! True, he had not betrayed Evelyn, for Dent evidently had not heard that Evelyn was in communication with Sophy—and fleetingly Evelyn wondered what would have happened if he had; but perhaps Meredith was only holding that weapon in reserve. If he struck with it . . . and if it brought Dent again to Évol . . . it crossed Evelyn's mind to wish the carrier's cart came on a Friday.

"Sophy," said Evelyn after a long silence, "I don't want to hear anything that Meredith said to you in confidence, but if it's only your own intuition I should like to know what you mean by 'paying for it now.'"

"He's in love with a woman that won't look at him: at least I don't think she will." Evelyn shifted in his chair. "She's not happy; she's living apart from her husband, and Meredith wants to profit by it. But he won't: not unless she goes reckless and picks him up as you'd pick up a dagger. That's all he would ever be to her."

"She never would do that."

"She? Who?"

"My wife."

"We don't want to talk of her," said Sophy on a dropped breath. "Men always draw the line at that."

"Ah! but I'm not much good at drawing lines."

"You did in Chelsea."

"Did that hurt? It wasn't so meant. It is an instinct with me to keep places and people to myself; I hated George Dent's coming here, though I'm very fond of him. I would most gladly have introduced my wife to you if it had occurred to me that you would care to know her, but it didn't. I'm very sorry."

Sophy bent down her head and furtively brushed her wrist across her eyelashes. This tender unworldly kindness was not what she had come to find at Évol, but it was inexpressibly sweet to her, sweeter far than passion. "Are you under the impression that I don't respect you because in the days of your forlorn youth you went astray? All the more reason why the women who never have been tempted should hold out a helping hand to you. My wife would. One can't answer for outsiders, but I can for her as I can for myself, and if I were living with her I'd take you to her now. But she has left me, as you know. Now tell me more about Meredith. You say he's still in love with her, and she has no protection. What's he after?"

"After her, of course. Meredith never lets go. He counts either on your doing something silly and giving her a chance to divorce you, or else on her getting so sick of it all that she'll do anything to make you divorce her. Meredith wouldn't mind being used as a dagger. He doesn't care how he gets a woman. He knows, once you've got her, you can suit yourself."

Evelyn smiled. "He had better not try that on with Kitty."

"Oh, you don't understand," said Sophy wearily. "When we're once in the same boat there's not a pin to choose between us, or rather it's the nicest women that come off worst because they suffer most. Of course Mrs. Evelyn's not like me. Sorry, that's trite, isn't it? If you were like most men, wouldn't you curse me for saying it! but what I mean is, she looks as if she could put up a stiffer fight than most women can. She's got such a way with her! Still, if Edmund's on the warpath, you ought to be looking after her, Charles. I was so glad, when I heard her call you Eve, that I'd always called you Charles." This conclusion was unforeseen and reduced Evelyn to silence.

Sophy took pity on him and gathered up her gloves and veil. "Look here, I'm dog-tired, and I'd like to go to bed now, please. Is there any other room or shall I curl up with a pillow on the floor?"

"There's the room Dent slept in last night. It's wretchedly inconvenient and crowded up with furniture, but he managed somehow."

"So long as there are no fleas I don't care," replied Miss Carter composedly. "And there won't be, if you've lived here for a twelvemonth. Last night I caught five running. That's the worst of these half-Spanish places! When they turn up in full force Keating's isn't any good. Still they're not so bad as bugs; we had bugs in Paris."

Evelyn ushered her upstairs; and strange it seemed to him to have to perform the same offices for her as for George Dent the night before—not entirely the

same however, because Sophy made her own bed, fingering the cold linen sheets with an appreciative hand, and sniffing at her pillowcase, which Madame Blanc had laid away in sprigs of wild hill lavender. When the big untidy room was made as fresh and neat as it could be, Sophy of her own accord came to Evelyn and pushed him gently through the doorway. "Good night, Charles, old fellow. Pleasant dreams!"

"I never dream."

"Don't you? I do like billy-ho, especially if I have my supper late. So if I sing out in the middle of the night you'll know what's up. Where d'you sleep? Near enough to hear me if I called you?"

"Here's my door."

"Oh, only just across the landing? I'm glad. This room is so big and so full of furniture to go to bed in with nothing but a candle. Say, you might whistle while you're undressing, it'll cheer me up to hear you. Well, good night again, positively the last appearance." She threw her arms round him and drew down his head. "Kiss me. Oh God, I wish it didn't hurt so!"

He kissed her.

"There! clear out," said Sophy, pushing him towards his own door. "Never you mind, it does hurt, but oh, I love you, love you, love you for being good!"

## CHAPTER XV

**I**N the cool of that evening when Sophy came to Évol, while out of the mountains the *tramontane* blew down into Perpignan and stirred the dense Southern dust in the streets of the little Southern town, Meredith had gone out with Kitty for a stroll among the neighbouring vineyards. The grapes were not ripe yet, their clusters hung green among their green and golden foliage, and forsaking the highway Meredith and Kitty wandered in among their unguarded furrows, over which a faint sweet scent hung like the scent of wine. Isolated like a city on a marsh, the eyeless walls and towers of Perpignan rose white and golden out of this leafy sea, and all round them the plains of Southern France stretched away illimitable under a blue evening sky, except on the south, where in cliff and cape those wild half-Spanish mountains lay unfeatured and faint as a cloud, staining, in their wan transparency of lilac shadow, the low air thick with sunset light and flushed like a sweetpea.

In the open vine-fields the heat was still heavy, the soil was burnt dry with it and struck warm underfoot. But there was a cooler air in the clear-obscure of the olive groves beyond, where the long rays that slanted between the dark twisted branches fell dimmed and silver-pale through clouds of thin leafage so fine as to be transparent, every narrow leaf under-glossed with silver, every point a star of silver fire. At the

foot of a tree fantastically coiled on its own waist like a dragon crawling out of a cave, near a shallow brook whose fleet waters washed through stems of scented watermint and carried away the scarlet petals of a wild japonica, Kitty sat down on a patch of turf, while Meredith, standing, lit a cigar and kept an eye on the road by which they expected Dent to follow them. At a distance of half a kilometre it would not be difficult to recognise the thickset, well-drilled figure and English country clothes. The evening train from Ria was already due and overdue, it would not be long now before they learnt whether Kitty's olive-branch had been accepted or rejected—always supposing it had ever been offered.

Meredith's own impression was that it would not have been offered. He expected to hear that Evelyn had been found living with Sophy. When he had learnt from Millerand the name of Evelyn's London agent, he had laughed, and Millerand with him, till their sides shook. Inconceivable, by these two cynical wits, the innocence that had gone to Sophy as a friend!

For Meredith had always believed Evelyn to be Sophy's lover. Evelyn's denial had staggered him, but only for a moment; naturally Evelyn, on the brink of matrimony, would deny an indiscretion—who wouldn't? Meredith most certainly would not have trusted any man with such a delicate confession. That the connection had continued during Evelyn's married life seemed to him improbable, that it had ceased when Evelyn vanished he was certain, for he had a way of dropping in to see Sophy now and again, and he had pitied her, she was evidently so lonely

and sad; but when Millerand told him that Sophy had sent him the *Suite* in April, Meredith remembered that in April Sophy had suddenly cheered up. That then was the date when communications were resumed! He went straight from Millerand to Chelsea, and there found that Miss Carter, that very day, had packed up her clothes and gone abroad without leaving any address. His instant conclusion was that she was joining Evelyn, and he went on to rummage among her papers without the shadow of a scruple. Challenged for a defence, he would have replied boldly that Sophy was more his property than Evelyn's. He had never loved her; but she had loved him, and had given herself to him in an undefended weakness which conferred on him proprietary rights in her for the rest of her life. He had unlocked her bureau with one of his own keys, Joséphine standing by half scandalised and half tickled, and had been immensely pleased when he found on the very top of her untidy pile of correspondence an envelope addressed to "Monsieur Charles Evelyn, Hôtel d'Évol, Ria, Py. O." Just like Sophy, to write a letter and forget to post it! He had not read it. He had meditated doing so, but—from a sense of honour—had refrained.

After all what need had he to read it, when he learned from Joséphine that Sophy's letters were to wait for her in Perpignan? People do not stay at Perpignan in June! Evidently it was only a stepping-stone to Ria; and for an hour Meredith sat idle, his forehead on his arm, indulging his imagination alternately in a vision of Sophy and Evelyn at Évol, and in more practical thoughts of what their sinful felicity might mean for him. For of course Mrs. Eve-

lyn could not be left in ignorance. Directly or indirectly he would have to open her eyes for her, and, too bold for hypocrisy, he owned to himself that he would rather like doing it. He was not gratuitously vindictive, but she had more than once stung him to the quick, and with the excuse of doing it for her own ultimate happiness he was not unwilling to use the knife.

Still he was not anxious to be associated in her memory with the surgeon's ungrateful office, and for that reason he had not yet betrayed Evelyn. There would be time enough when Dent came back from Évol in redhot indignation to say "Ah, this is what I've been afraid of all along."

"Who *is* Meredith?" Wright had once asked Evelyn, and Evelyn had replied in all simplicity that he hadn't the faintest idea. And yet no mystery hung over Meredith's birth. It was only that he had never seen much of his parents. He was the son of a well-to-do Wiltshire squire, who had early handed over the duties of his estate to an agent because they bored him, and entered at Lincoln's Inn. Hubert Meredith had in perfection the legal mind. He did well at the Bar, took silk at forty-three, married at forty-five the heiress of a Judge, and so united two comfortable incomes. He was moderately fond of his wife and she of him, but by common consent, after Edmund's birth, they had no more children. An income has to be very comfortable indeed before it will cover the claims of half a dozen growing boys and girls.

So the only child grew up in an agreeable freedom

from rivalry, petted—in moderation—by his mother, and neglected by his father, whose energy and ambition were concentrated on his Chancery work. In due course Meredith went to Sherborne (not Eton: the K. C. had been at Eton, but in those days living was not so expensive), and thence to Cambridge, where a First in the Modern Languages Tripos made his way superfluously smooth for him into the diplomatic service of the old easy, exclusive days. "My boy has never given me a moment's anxiety," said the elder Meredith proudly.

Then came the war, which cut across so many lives, and Edmund applied for a commission—not in any unseemly hurry; he loathed the thought of Army discipline, and it was late in 1915 before he began to feel uncomfortable in civilian attire. Still, once in, he did his duty well. But he hated taking an order and was unaffectedly glad to be demobilised. He never returned to his diplomatic career. His father had died in the interval, and Edmund, now a rich man, had had enough of harness. He had always had a turn for literature and a taste for music, and between the two he drifted gradually into the ranks of musical criticism; incurably an amateur, a dilettante, though he had the technique of both arts at his fingertips.

He had been sorry when his father died, but not too sorry. His mother was still alive, a mild old lady who divided her year between Torquay and the Côte d'Azur. Every autumn the *Journal de Bordighera* chronicled the arrival of "Mrs. Meredith and Suite," the suite consisting of a rather uppish maid and a rather dejected companion, for Mrs. Meredith, though always placid, was only just as kind as a pan-

oply of egotism allowed. Her pleasant selfishness became her as harmoniously as her jetted dresses and floating veils became her comely, plump, and sedentary body. She was fond of Edmund, and wrote to him every Sunday; but "Your affectionate Mother" was perfectly satisfied to hear back once or twice a month from "Yr. affcte. Son."

An ordinary life and an agreeable: and Meredith himself would have been the last to complain of his lot. Yet there were two great agencies whose operation he had never felt, love and sorrow. Begotten and born of thin emotions, he had inherited his father's brain and his mother's temper, but the generation of 1890 was not so tough as that of 1860, and Meredith was weaker than they. Nor was he stiffened as they were by the Victorian tradition of decency. It was their safeguard. Meredith had none. Pleasure was his law of life: hence his dealings with Sophy—which would have horrified the K. C. For all that, 1890 dreamed dreams to which 1860 was blind, and there were forces in Meredith that might have raised him above his parents' level if his life had called them out. It had not done so yet.

Strangely enough, it had come nearest to doing so in his pursuit of Kitty Evelyn, the first of his rather frequent love affairs that had involved him in a conflict of principle. He was genuinely fond of Evelyn, within the rather narrow limits set by his vanity. He cherished for Evelyn the slightly supercilious affection of the disciplined mind for the undisciplined, of the firm, deliberate, and consistent will for the will that is rarely sure of its aims and never ruthless in achieving them. It was because there had always

been this vein of patronage in his feeling for Evelyn that he had drifted unconsciously into conduct which ordinarily he would have considered base. Evelyn really wasn't good enough for Kitty and didn't even appreciate her: who should blame Meredith for stealing what Evelyn had never valued? In this way he justified or rather disguised his treachery in Chelsea; but he suffered in it.

Kitty too made him suffer. In his earlier love-affairs it had been the woman who went to the wall. Kitty, over whom he had no power, was the involuntary avenger of her sex. She did not even enjoy tormenting him as she had enjoyed tormenting Dimsdale Smith; Dimmie under the table was amusing and she liked him, but Meredith, from the moment when he threw off the mask, ceased to please her. Lovers like poets succeed better in fiction than in truth, and when he was in earnest he became indiscreet and outspoken and the touch of his hot hand offended her. Still, she was sorry for him; and there was warmth in being loved as he loved her, after the misery of Evelyn's coldness.

And when the household in Chelsea broke up it was through this vein of sincerity in him that he was able to regain his lost place in Kitty's friendship. Meredith was not glad, as a more thoroughly common mind might have been. He was profoundly distressed: angry with Evelyn and grieved for Kitty, and yet grieved for Evelyn too, and troubled by the knowledge that Evelyn must have beggared himself to repay his debt. It was an impulse of which Meredith was more than half ashamed, a piece of boyish generosity, which made him offer to become the anonymous tenant of

Temple Evelyn. Mixed motives as usual came into play, for at Temple Evelyn he would be close to the Manor Farm, but it was a wise philosopher who said that we are entitled to be judged by the best of our determining motives, and Meredith would have done it in any event for Evelyn's sake.

Mixed motives then took him to Temple Evelyn, but gradually, when no news came, the ties of friendship began to weaken. What had happened between husband and wife he knew no more than Dent did, but, like Dent, he thought that nothing could condone Evelyn's flight. He saw Kitty solitary and passionately unhappy, deserted and without protection—free then, or in a fair way to be free to reshape her life, miraculously placed within his reach again when he had believed her lost to him for ever; and now came the last turn of the wheel, when this man, who had not cared seriously for a woman since his boyhood, found out that the luxury and distinction which he had prized so highly would be dust and ashes if he could not soon or late win her for his wife. At once his manner changed, and the lover whom Kitty had pitied and disliked was transformed into a friend in whom she could find no fault. There was much that was chivalrous in his feeling for her now, and, since he hoped to marry her, it was entirely respectful, for his egoism came to her aid, throwing over her the shield of his self-love. The woman who was to become his wife must be untouched by suspicion. During the twelve months of his stay at Temple Evelyn—and towards the end of the time he was meeting her every day—he had not once reminded her of the scene in Chelsea.

Kitty supposed him cured. When he offered his services as courier she hesitated, but only for a moment; the long journey frightened her, George Dent was openly relieved, and it would have been ungracious to refuse. For Meredith knew the Continent from Astrakhan to the Pillars of Hercules, and time tables had no terrors for him; his French was cosmopolitan and he had enough Spanish to make a guess at Catalan; porters fawned on him, and even the Parisian taxi-driver subsided into moderation under that cold blue stare. So Meredith and Kitty and George Dent came out to Perpignan together.

But Meredith was only biding his time to strike, and when Dent returned from Ria his chance came and he took it.

"There comes George's train," said Meredith. Along the branch line from Perpignan to Villefranche trains were not so frequent as to admit of a mistake. "Twenty minutes behind time as usual. These French railways are a disgrace. They want a few good English managers at the head of them. Hallo!"

"What, then?"

"The most beautiful butterfly in all the world has settled on your hat. 'Knows a good thing when he sees it, ce Monsieur-là.' " Kitty bowed her head and the butterfly, drowsy after day-long sunshine, fluttered languidly off to a stalk of yellow mullein and sat there waving its orient wings. Heavy they were and thick with iridescent down, flashing prismatically from grass-green through gold into flame; their last gleam before they furled was red as a winter sunset. Kitty's face lit up but she crushed her hands together

as if to repress the élan of pleasure. "How Eve would love that!"

Meredith started. Since leaving Chelsea she had not often of her own free will pronounced Evelyn's name. "So he would," Meredith agreed tonelessly. "He was fond of pretty things."

"It's so strange to know that he's only a few miles away: watching the same sunset, from those very hills that I can see. George might even bring him back with him; there, the train's stopped—perhaps he's just getting out on the platform—coming through the Sortie. Now George is looking for Bartolomé, and Bartolomé's telling him where I am. They would be sure to follow us, wouldn't they? Eve would travel light, or if he had any luggage Bartolomé could take it to the hotel."

Meredith occupied himself with his cigar. He could not trust his voice to answer her. It was the first time that Kitty had taken off her delicate but impenetrable mask, and his own handsome face, generally immovable in cold good temper, betrayed strain in a deepening of the lines from nostril to jaw, for it is almost impossible to endure unexpected stab after stab without flinching, and he was taken by surprise; he had hoped and latterly he had allowed himself to feel certain that pride had worn down Kitty's love during a twelvemonth of desertion, but here was love undying and as fresh as ever! Love and sorrow, Evelyn's wedding gift. . . . Meredith had already acquired generosity enough to forget his own disappointment in painful anger.

Kitty scarcely noticed his silence. She was entirely off her guard, every faculty absorbed in suspense.

"I ought never to have left him," she went on, more to herself than to Meredith. "It has been my fault—far, far more mine than his. One does things in a blind hurry, because one's life seems suddenly to become intolerable, as if one had come to the very end, but there is no end, only an anti-climax. One lives on, and turn after turn of the road opens out as one grows older. I see it all differently now. I ought to have stayed. I hated hurting him. But that was cowardly too."

Meredith blew out a mouthful of smoke and watched it slowly dissolve away amid their canopy of pointed olive leaves. "Since none of us asked to be born," he said with deliberation, "I am of opinion that when the conditions of life become intolerable one is entitled to change them. Necessity knows no law."

"Necessity is the cloak that we invent to cover cowardice."

"You're in a very epigrammatic mood tonight, my dear friend."

There was effort in his voice, but in her deep pre-occupation Kitty, so sensitive as a rule, was blind and deaf to it. "Don't scold me! It's a first offence."

"No, no," said Meredith smiling. "You have a diamond wit."

"And you like me on condition that I never wear it. Be at ease! I'm only clever by inadvertence."

"Like you, do I? Yes, even when you're absent-minded," Meredith murmured. ". . . But you're too stern; you're a Stoic. Or is it that you pre-suppose a religious contract?"

"Between us and God?" said Kitty with a curl of the lip. "No, there's no contract. There's no free-

dom. One obeys because it is His will, and when His hand is heavy one can only go on obeying. He's our only true necessity. That's my creed. I didn't get it out of a book."

Meredith shaded his eyes with his hand. "Well, now's your chance to practise it." She had hurt him so cruelly that he was more than half glad to hurt her, but he had the grace not to watch her. "Here comes Dent, and alone."

He waved to Dent, who left the road and came striding down a furrow between the vines, their green tendrils catching at his knees as he brushed through. Kitty stood up. By Dent's dark look and bent head she saw that he was bringing bad news, and her courage steeled itself to meet it. She was armed again at all points before he reached the stream.

"Tired, George? We've had such a hot day here! Mr. Meredith and I went out by tram to Canet and sat on the sands. But it would be fresher in the mountains."

"It was as hot as Hades in the train," grumbled Dent, wiping his forehead.

"I'll go back to the hôtel now," said Meredith. "I've a letter I want to write; and Dent will bring you in, Mrs. Evelyn." But Kitty put her hand on his arm.

"No, stay; George and I have no secrets from you. Go on, George: it's understood that your mission wasn't a success."

His feet rather wide apart and his hat tipped to the back of his head, Dent stood digging a hole in the turf with his walking stick: a solid English figure, outraged common sense in every line. "Well, I've

seen him. Slept last night at his place. It's an inn up in the mountains, ten miles from Ria by a road one could hardly drive, and it took me hours to walk because I kept on missing it—just the inn and nothing else, not another house within sight, not a shop—and there lives my lord, winter and summer—”

“Alone?” said Meredith in his colourless voice.

“Lord, yes—not a servant about the place: does everything for himself with a Primus stove and a piano. Works all day long at that rotten opera, never stops except to boil an egg or knock off a hymn-tune—”

“A hymn-tune! Knock off a hymn-tune?”

“When he goes stale on the opera he knocks off a hymn or a waltz by way of a change; that's how he came to write that *Sweet Pyrenees* you heard, Meredith. Suite Pyrenean, then, it's all one. Oh, he's mad!” Dent burst out angrily. “Mad as a hatter. There are lots of Johnnies boxed up in an asylum that aren't half so mad as Eve.”

“But what does he do for food,” asked Kitty, “if there aren't any shops?”

“There's a farm two miles off that he can get eggs and butter from, and the rest of the vivers come up from Ria once a week. You needn't get anxious, my girl, he's not starving! On the contrary, he looks better than I've ever seen him; more flesh on him, and a better colour than he used to be. I can't think how he stands it! I'm not faddy, but the loneliness of that place would get on my nerves. He doesn't even lock up at night! Shuts the shutters because the change of temperature's bad for his beastly piano and goes to bed with the door unbarred. Gets his

bath in a brook—kept that up all through the winter, for I asked him, though he had to dig a hole through the ice to get into it. If it were anything but a string of cascades it'd be frozen solid. When he was at Temple Evelyn he used to dust up the maids if the water wasn't boiling. There's no getting even with a chap like Eve, one day he wants a hot bath in August, and the next he's rolling in the snow."

"Did he—" Meredith waited a moment, choosing his words—"did he seem in any way to resent your coming?"

"Don't know, didn't ask: I was too jolly glad to get there. I tell you, Meredith, it's the most God-forsaken spot you ever saw! Red cliffs a thousand feet high, zig-zagging to and fro, and so steep that if you fell over the parapet you'd never stop till you got to the bottom. It was dark before I reached it and I made sure I was off on the wrong track; I could *not* believe a chap like Evelyn would have stuck it out for thirteen months in a beastly hole like that."

"Laying himself out for an interview," suggested Meredith smoothly. "'Eminent Pianist's Mountain Nook,' with photographic illustrations." He felt Kitty stiffen, and retraced the false step. "But of course Evelyn's always been incapable of posing." He was raging inwardly; it irked him to madness to have to apologise to Evelyn under penalty of offending Evelyn's wife.

"And when is Evelyn coming to Perpignan?" Kitty asked in her gentle careless voice. She knew the answer beforehand by Dent's voluble, irrelevant irritation.

"He won't come, old girl."

"Doesn't he want to see me again?"

"No; I couldn't get him."

"Did you try hard?"

Dent, who was not stupid, shrugged his shoulders.  
"Yes, I did: very hard. I said everything I could think of. It ain't a case for standing on one's dignity. I told him you were down and out and sorry you'd ever left him—"

"Oh!"

"Well, you are, aren't you? Hang it, you did leave him! He stuck to you all right."

"Yes, I am sorry, and you did right to say so." Kitty's voice was schooled again to composure, though her cheeks were burning. "I was just owning to Mr. Meredith that after thirteen months of reflection in the wilderness I can now see and confess I was wrong. Neither Eve nor I had the right to break the bond because it galled us. But Eve evidently hasn't been in the wilderness, and so he hasn't learnt his lesson yet. You tell me he's growing fat!" She glanced down at her own fine slenderness, and once again, as the alteration in her looks came freshly home to him, Meredith was swept by a rush of grief and anger. Kitty had not grown fat during those months of separation. "He's been letting out his coats while I've been taking in my dresses!"

"I didn't tell him that," Dent said, digging his stick deeper than ever into the river-side turf, which now looked as though it had been undermined by worm-casts. "I wasn't going to make a poor mouth."

The silence that followed was broken by Meredith in his most detached and deliberate tone. "What time was it when you got to Évol?"

"Between ten and eleven last night. Why?"

Meredith raised his eyebrows. "Well, one's naturally interested in the details of such a curious household. Was Evelyn in bed?"

"No, he was smoking a cigarette on the steps. But he was on his way to bed. He goes off at eleven and gets up at six."

"And did you get up at six too?" Meredith enquired. "I suppose not, since he was sufficiently hospitable to keep you till the evening train."

"No fear! I was shot out soon after ten o'clock this morning. Evelyn walked down with me to Ria. I left by the middle-day train; but I stopped to get some lunch in Villefranche, and lost the connection." Meredith brushed away a smile. Dent, if he had chosen, could have reached Perpignan by lunch-time. For all his valiant manner, he had shirked breaking the bad news to Kitty.

"Then you actually were not twelve hours in Évol? You can't have seen much of it, but presumably there wasn't much to see. One knows those upland *métairies* so well, nice old places, solidly built, and quite picturesque, with their thick walls and tiny windows, but they haven't many rooms. Did Evelyn show you over it?"

"Yes—no: there was nothing to go over. Livingroom and kitchen on the ground floor, and two bedrooms above. I had the back room. It was comfortable enough."

"And what was Evelyn's like? Luxurious, I'd swear."

"I didn't see it," said Dent shortly. "I wasn't invited to stay on and I didn't want to. Oh Lord yes,

we parted on friendly terms! I wasn't going to quarrel with Eve after all these years. But I was angry. I *am* angry. Not but what it was your fault to start with, Kitty, you wrote him a beastly letter. It no longer surprises me that you never would own up what was in it. Just like a woman! you punch a man under the belt and then you wonder what he's sulking for. I should have sulked if any woman had written me a letter like that, she might have whistled for me to go back to her. Still thirteen months is thirteen months, and so I told him."

"What an impressive argument! And yet he wasn't impressed? He's so obstinate!"

"Yes, I told him that too, that he was as—"

"—stubborn as Carter's mule? Georgy, I do wish some day you would tell me who Carter was. Couldn't you, for a Christmas present?"

Dent uttered a noise between a giggle and a snort—he did not wish to be amused, but Kitty could always make him laugh—and turned, cutting at the vines with his stick. "Well, that's all. He won't come: sent his love to you, which I told him was dashed impudence and I shouldn't give it you: and now I'll go and get some dinner. It's a quarter to nine and I want a wash."

He swung off, leaving them to follow or not as they liked. Kitty was doing so when Meredith seized her arm. "Wait one moment," he said, with difficulty controlling his voice. "There's something I want to say to you. My turn now."

"Mr. Meredith!"

"Do wait. I won't say anything that Dent mightn't hear. I'd as soon speak before him as not." He was

still holding her arm. Kitty unlocked his fingers and freed herself but without moving away. At last and in the twinkling of an eye she had taken the measure of his passion, and it frightened her, but she was too proud to run from it: though he was different, dangerously different from the Meredith of Chelsea with his flushed face and hot eyes and fierce, unguarded manner. He was cold enough now; his hand was like ice.

"You can stop me directly I offend you, but if I do it will be unintentional. I do love you." It was evident: the more so that he was fighting down with an iron hand the agitation that threatened to overpower him. "More than I did in Chelsea. I must own to having deceived you when I asked leave to come out to France as your friend. I'm not your friend. But for all that, if there had been any prospect of a reconciliation with Evelyn, I should have dropped out of your life without worrying you again. Now however it's clear that there will be none, for if Dent couldn't patch it up no one else ever will unless you went to him yourself, and you won't do that—will you?"

"No."

"So that the position which you yourself call intolerable will continue indefinitely. What misery for you! Married, and not married: all your youth running to waste. Kitty, come to me!"

## CHAPTER XVI

"**L**ET us understand each other," said Kitty soberly. "Are you asking me to leave my husband for you?"

Within the last half hour, low clouds had taken shape along the sunset: mountain clouds, faint sculpturings of lilac mist and marble, into which the sun had gone down early in a blur of faint red. All the plain was beginning to turn blue under the incoming tide of twilight, a tide that washed up and up like a blue sea, shading with azure the green leaves of the vines and the silver leaves of the olives and the velvet spire of a cypress pricking an early star. Yet the air was not cool, there was a weight of heat in it and the *tramontane* had died down: it felt as though between cloud and mountain a storm were brewing, high and far away.

"Let me put my coat under you," said Meredith gently, "then you won't soil your dress." He spread his coat on the riverside turf in the dense shadow of a chestnut, feeling glad to be screened from the road behind its droop of green fans. Ever since leaving England he had ached to be alone with Kitty, and now in the vague twilight he had his wish, but his manner remained as gentle and formal as before.

"Let me first apologise for the way I behaved to you in Chelsea. I am not going to repeat that offence. I didn't love you so well then as I do now. I've learnt to value your happiness more than my own,

and if you really were happy—But, of course, you aren't."

"Quite true," Kitty smiled assent. "I am most unhappy."

"Because English society doesn't provide for the happiness of a woman who lives apart from her husband. It allows you, at least while you're so young, no life of your own. Now you're not the sort of woman to be content with a Cambridgeshire village. You want money and an assured position."

"I don't want anything except Evelyn."

He took that blow without flinching. "But, since you can't have him, why not put up with second-best? Oh, my friend, I've no illusions! not even about myself. I love you, but it won't last—passion never lasts: you care for your husband, but that won't last either: indeed, to be brutally frank, it's probable that if you came to me I could make you forget him and care for me instead. . . . I may go on? . . . Nature makes short work of our sentimentalities. She has her own job to perform. That's why on an average the arranged foreign marriages turn out as well as ours do. . . . If you have ever visualised me as your lover, you've always seen yourself shrinking from me. I say you would not shrink. Not for more than a few minutes." He drew himself erect and held back his broad shoulders as if to make her feel the force of manhood latent in him. "Call me a materialist if you like, but, with physiological laws behind me, I am certain that I could substitute myself for Evelyn in your affections. Even if that were not so, however, in three years' time the romance would be out of both of us, but you would still have the solid advantages I could give you."

"Money no doubt, but as to the assured position I'm not so clear. Evelyn may be a halfhearted husband, but after all I am his wife."

"Evelyn is practically dead."

"As good as dead?" Kitty murmured with her imperceptible irony. "Not in the eyes of the law."

"If he were dead you wouldn't hesitate to marry again."

"No?"

"No, you're too sensible," said Meredith bluntly. "A woman who loses her husband before she's twenty-five always marries again if she gets the chance. Evelyn is morally dead to you. If you came to me he would divorce you, in a year's time you would be my wife, in another six months or so we should be settled in town, and who would blame you for it? You know as well as I do that the stiffest households overlook such necessary bits of reconstruction, which are forced on people every day by our out of date divorce laws. Before three years were up the story would be virtually forgotten and you would be in a position to pick and choose your acquaintance!"

Kitty rose and stood facing him in the green shadow, her hands clenched behind her waist over the ivory stick of her parasol. The words that rose to her lips were the *clichés* of helpless anger consecrated to such a situation on the stage. But how unfair it would have been to cry "How dare you?" to Meredith, who was only infringing rights which there was no one to defend! Evelyn's desertion left her exposed to worse insults than the offer of an irregular marriage. "Thank you," she answered, "you mean well, but I am oldfashioned, and I should feel it a disgrace to be

divorced. Oh, more than a disgrace! A sin—you know what a sin is? What you go to Hell for when you die."

"Divorce him yourself then."

"For what? for desertion? you know he has given me no other grounds."

"Has he not?"

"Explain, please," said Kitty, imperturbable except for the flush that tinged her cheek.

Meredith stood for a minute or more silent, with bent head. Now that the brink was reached he was reluctant to take the plunge. It was against his code to betray a man to a woman, and he had hoped against hope that Dent would have the sense to come on some damning evidence which would make Meredith's testimony superfluous. But now there was no other way of winning Kitty; and Evelyn had betrayed her. Meredith hardened his heart.

"You force me into an odious position, because I used to be Evelyn's friend. But I am yours even more, and I feel bound to tell you that I did not get his address from Millerand, but from a woman of light character, who was generally suspected of being his mistress before he married you."

"She gave it you?"

"Millerand referred me to her." Meredith was not ashamed of his treachery to Sophy—a woman, and a light woman at that: alas, poor Sophy!—but he did feel that it would be as well not to go into unnecessary details which Kitty might misunderstand. "Millerand never had Evelyn's address. All the arrangements for the production of the *Suite* passed through her hands. I need hardly tell you what conclusion Miller-

and had drawn. As Evelyn must have foreseen. One supposes he didn't care."

"But where was she then—this woman?"

"She has been living in Chelsea, in the flat above Evelyn's. She was in it during all the time of your marriage."

Kitty had the sensation of having a dagger thrust into her side. But it was no sooner driven home than she wrenched it out again. Whatever else was or was not true, the touchstone of an upright mind rejected this poisonous implication. "Sophy Carter? Yes, I know her name. You hint that Evelyn was deceiving me with her? He wasn't. Nor did he leave me for her. But he might have gone to her since."

"Or she to him. She left London a few days ago for Perpignan. This morning after breakfast I went the round of the hôtels without finding any trace of her."

"But my husband is alone at Évol!"

Meredith was silent.

"You forget that George has just been staying there."

"Dent arrived after ten last night and left early this morning; 'shot out' was his own word."

"However little time it was, he did stay there, and one couldn't conceal a woman's presence in a cottage like that! Evelyn took him all over it—"

"Did he?"

"Why, there were only four rooms! the parlour and kitchen, and the room George slept in, and—"

Kitty stopped, and after a moment turned away. She felt herself blushing like a young girl who has

come unawares on a sight not fit for her, and she could not endure Meredith's eyes. She had grown weak and hot from head to foot, the trees and grass began to change colour, then came a deadly sensation of lassitude . . . and then Meredith's voice, low and fierce, "Kitty! Kitty! damn him! what right has he to make you suffer so?"

Languidly Kitty opened her eyes. She was lying flat on the turf and Meredith was kneeling over her, moistening her forehead with a wet handkerchief. His keen handsome features were as white as her own, his lips were parted, he looked like a man very much in love and yet shaken by pity, as if he were actually thinking more of her than of himself. Kitty shut her eyes again. Her mind was working lucidly, but a dire exhaustion weighed down her limbs and her voice. She felt Meredith's hand on her wrist, and she tried to tell him that she was already better and there was no need for anxiety, but no sound came, and she lay still, in a respite that was not unwelcome: too tired to be angry, though she knew that Meredith in spite of his genuine distress was enjoying the privileges that her dependence conferred. A vein of cold cynicism in Kitty was even grateful to him for enjoying them.

And rapidly and dispassionately she went over in her own mind what had passed between them in the last twenty minutes. Till near the very end his arguments had left her untouched; she had listened because it was her habit to give a hearing to anyone who asked for it, but for all the impression they made she might as well have stopped her ears. Her principles were fixed, oldfashioned and founded on relig-

ious considerations; other women might run away with their lovers if they liked—

“Different people have different opinions”—

but such things simply did not happen to Kitty Dent. It was true that she had in imagination seen Meredith as her lover, because when a subject is once started in an active mind there are few thoughts that do not cross it at one time or another, but these visions were on a par with the daydreams of murdering our nearest and dearest in which we all indulge now and then. They had never produced anything warmer than an amused smile. But—and this time it was her own hand that drove the knife into her quivering side and held and pressed it firmly home—if Evelyn had given her the right to divorce him it made a difference: yes, a profound and far-reaching difference.

For after all by what law was she bound to Evelyn? Social? There is no social law that condemns the re-marriage of the innocent party. Moral? Race ethics would be better served by her union with Meredith. Religious? Well! that bar held fast for a High Anglican, but not for every school. Kitty had been brought up to believe that divorce in itself was shameful and re-marriage a mortal sin—indeed rather more damning for the innocent than for the guilty, who were damned already! Such was George Dent's simple creed, and from it nothing would have moved him. But religion, the religion of principle and conduct, meant a great deal to George Dent, who was too tough and self-reliant to care how lonely his path was or how stony underfoot so long as it ran between the

hedges of duty. Not all of us are called to follow counsels of perfection. Kitty was not weak, but she was practical; nothing would have made her do what she thought wrong, but she doubted whether Dent and his High Anglicans had a monopoly of rectitude. "I'm not so religious as George is, nor so old," she reflected. And she blushed, remembering certain moods not of the spirit that had come on her in her loneliness, and which it had taken her last inch of strength to fight down. Danger, the danger of presumption, lies in nailing a middle-class mind to the cross of an ideal too high for it.

But if she was not bound to Evelyn by laws social, or moral, or religious, what link was left except what Meredith had called sentimentality—that sterile tenderness which clings to its past instead of turning to meet the future?

Suppose she divorced Evelyn to marry Meredith: the step would require courage, but in courage Kitty had never been deficient. Faith too: but on that score Kitty felt tranquil—she was not of those women whom men betray. As surely as she committed her honour into Meredith's hands, she could trust him to cherish it as the honour of his wife. So far as that went, she could have trusted him even in an irregular connection; if she had gone to him before securing legal freedom, she knew that he would have married her at the first possible moment. And watching from under her eyelashes that strained, quivering face, she wondered what it would be like to become his wife: to exchange this torturing devotion to the past, for a determined grip on life's second-best.

Children—the children of Meredith instead of the

children of Evelyn . . . strange idea! Almost beyond imagination, yet not quite: she shuddered at it, but there would be relief in it: the forces of nature pushed her towards it, in their imperious need of fruition. And a social place of her own—that drew Kitty, who in her young days had liked the prospect of ruling Temple Evelyn. At what price? At the price of submission to an unsparing and dominant love. After six months of marriage to Evelyn Kitty still felt like a maiden, but she divined that Meredith would not leave her one vestige of her innocent and delicate reserve: nor would she, though absolved by every law, cease to feel unchaste. What! give herself to Meredith while Evelyn lived? Oh never, never! . . . Yet suppose one took this great step, what a change! How swiftly one would be drawn out of one's torpid back-water and flung down the main stream of life again, in wind and sun!

"Edmund. . . ."

"Kitty! my own! you will come to me?"

Still languid, she raised herself on one arm again and pushed him away, her hand against his coat. "Listen: don't touch me. I don't love you. I love my husband. I always have loved Evelyn ever since I was a child, and you never would make me forget him: in your arms I should remember him and wish I were in his. This is the truth, and it will always remain true. If I come to you perhaps some day I shall deny it and say you've made me forget him, but I warn you beforehand that that won't be true: it will only mean that I'm more fond of you and more sorry for you than than I am now. I am Evelyn's."

"Wait till you've been mine a year—"

Half sad and half mocking, the smile in her eyes put him to silence. "Are all men children? Listen again, and try to believe that I understand myself better than you do; I shouldn't like it if some day you were to reproach me with not having warned you. You never will? Oh! yes, you will, men always forget what they would rather not have heard. Listen, Edmund; if I come to you it'll be for what I can get out of you, 'money and a position,' and, what I want far more, an active life of wide interests and fresh feelings. I'm not patient: I'm full of energy, and at the Manor Farm I haven't enough to fill my hands. I like pleasure, I don't much mind pain, but I cannot stand inaction. I'd rather go through any amount of wear and tear than be laid up in lavender."

"I don't care a snap of the fingers why you come to me so long as you do come."

"Pears' Soap!" Kitty jeered at him. "Listen—don't touch me: I'm not yours yet. Do you hate me for making conditions? Am I hard? Well, you can take me or leave me—I feel hard. I can see you're hurt, and I'm sorry for you, but not very sorry, because I'm hurt too and if I come to you I—I—"

She broke down and sobbed, hiding her face in her handkerchief against Meredith's arm.

"Kitty, my sweetest, my own," Meredith soothed her brokenly, "I could shoot Evelyn when I see you suffer so!"

"But I never will come to you unless—"

"Unless what, my dearest?"

"So long as Evelyn is faithful to me."

Meredith sighed. In some ways he would rather have made sure of Kitty out of hand by an irregular

connection and left it to Evelyn to set her free: one could trust Evelyn to be generous. An undefended suit, it would have gone through so quickly and quietly, whereas now . . . To divorce Evelyn meant interminable delay, and tedious prudence from end to end of it; this very journey was an indiscretion. . . . And in the bottom of his heart Meredith was not so certain of Sophy's presence at Évol as he would have liked to be. It must be so, and yet. . . . He had no particular faith in Evelyn's married morality, but there were limitations of taste and temperament to consider: Evelyn's temperament, so cold, eternally preoccupied with his work, and Sophy's so fond of luxury! Wouldn't it require a bolder woman than Sophy to face the solitudes of Évol? Could she live without a shop?

"I accept that decision, Kitty: though I rather regret it. This is one of the cases where there's much to gain and little to lose by defying convention."

"Leave me, then," said Kitty, languidly rising to her feet. "Oh, why was I so inconsiderate as to faint in this dress? I've only one other with me, and now I'm all dusty. Well, leave me: marry a nice girl that you can marry out of hand without going through the mud for her. I owe you friendship and gratitude, but I won't defy convention for you. If you want me you must give everything and I shall give nothing. It's a bad bargain."

"I call no bargain **bad** that gives me you," said Meredith hoarsely.

Kitty's eyelashes fluttered, her bosom rose and fell: she was too young not to feel glad to be desired. And yet—"I am doing wrong," she said, turning her

small, still, white face and wide eyes towards the starlit redness of after-sunset. "Adultery does not condone adultery."

"Kitty! it is you for calling a spade a spade. How oldfashioned you are in your heart! Do you really believe all these 'fables and antique toys'? Ah well, I love you for that too, for being different from most of the women I've known. After all, when it comes to getting married, one likes a woman to be religious. No, I wouldn't have you come to me on any other terms; if you did I shouldn't trust you as my wife, whereas now—"

"Now you take it as a compliment to your manhood that you can make me sin with my eyes open?"

"I love you," said Meredith humbly.

She was touched by that and smiled at him. "At all events there shall be no half measures. I won't come to you unless Evelyn betrays me, but if I do I'll grudge nothing and I'll never look back."

## CHAPTER XVII

THEN, by Meredith's wish, the strange terms on which he stood with Kitty were laid before George Dent. Meredith said, "Let us do nothing underhand. I've no one to consult, but your brother is your natural guardian and ought to be told. We're in for a long wait, and we shall have to act with the utmost prudence, for I dare say you know enough of the law to understand that you wouldn't obtain your divorce if any gossip got about. I shan't be able to see much of you when we're back in England. I ought not to be here now. Most certainly I ought not to have been here last night while Dent was away. But, since to that extent the mischief's done, I should prefer, unless you dislike the idea very strongly, to be quite open with your brother. He's always behaved very decently to me and I should feel like a sweep if I deceived him." This view commended itself to Kitty, a scorner of crooked ways and dark corners. It made her feel that her feet were on firm ground. Meredith was sincere in it.

In the half-Spanish *patio* of their hôtel that evening, with undisputed courage and tact and temper, Meredith gave Dent the substance of what had passed between him and Kitty. He did not even conceal the irregularity of his original offer. The sky overhead was densely and deeply blue, as if all the dust of noon floated under the bright sparkling stars, and darkened them. The courtyard, shut between four dazzling

lingly white walls that had reflected the sun all day, was intensely hot, and crammed with flowers so thickly planted that one could not move between them—tall palms, the pink papery blossoms of *lauriers roses*, golden *épaulettes d'officier*, garlands of heliotrope, thickets of rose and fuchsia and hydrangea, packed together into one rich heady-scented tangle without grass or shade. Among the sycomores in the not far distant *Place* a military band was playing *Sous les Ponts de Paris*—

Hô-tel du Cour - ant d'Air,      Où l'on ne paie pas  
 cher,... L'parfum et l'eau c'est pour rien mon mar -  
 quis,      Sous les ponts de Par - is....

with the precision and gaiety which are the birth-right of sweet France: and there no doubt under the shadow of the plane trees, in and out among the tables at which their parents sat frugally sipping *sirops* at fifteen sous a glass and red wine at two francs a litre, the young men and girls were waltzing with the incommunicable *entrain* of youth. The merry, sad little tune which praised love and made a jest of poverty was mingled with the hushed murmur of a fountain behind Meredith's clear, soft voice.

"Do you know anything about the divorce laws?" Dent shook his head. "Well, divorce for desertion is a slow business, and one has to go deucedly cautiously to work. If it came out in court that Kitty—

that I—that she was going to marry again, as likely as not her petition would be refused and she would be tied to Evelyn for the rest of her life. In any event, English society doesn't draw much of a line between the woman who divorces her husband and the woman who is divorced by him. Broadly speaking, both are received in London and cold-shouldered in the country. So that I was more than half inclined to take Kitty away now and leave it to Evelyn to set her free. It would have meant beginning with an irregular step. But it wouldn't have lasted long—not one day longer than I could help; and it would have come to the same thing in the end, and a much quicker end. I own I dislike this long delay and separation with no declarable engagement. In all the circumstances, I hope, Dent, you're not going to be angry with me for suggesting such a step."

"But you didn't agree to Meredith's proposal, Kitty?" said Dent, turning his kind sad eyes on his sister. Kitty glanced down. She was in the thinnest and softest of grey dresses, her arms and shoulders only veiled: its semi-transparency revealed how thin and fragile she had grown, slenderer now in her finished maturity of womanhood than in her teens.

"No: but I wasn't angry with him. I am not happy at the Manor Farm now, George. It isn't that I'm tired of it, I love the dear old place as much as ever, but one can't, after being a married woman, go back and be a girl again."

"Of course the stock arguments would be thrown away," Dent mused, lighting his pipe. "I'm not going to preach. You wouldn't listen if I did. . . . Do I think it wrong? Well, I don't think: I know, and so do you, old girl. 'Course it's wrong. You ought to

stick to Eve. By what I can make out you ought to have stuck to him all along, but anyhow you've no right to pick and choose now, say you don't like this and you can't put up with t'other. We weren't sent into this world to be happy but to do our duty. So far as I can see, it don't signify two straws whether we're happy or not. If it comes to that, you two in making yourselves happy will make me wretched for the rest of my life: but I don't say that to influence you—that's not the point."

"Is it my leaving Evelyn that you dislike so much, or my re-marriage?"

"Re-marriage! I wonder you can sit there and talk about re-marriage. You're a Churchwoman, aren't you? Oh Lord yes! you'll soon find a clergyman that's willing to 're-marry' you. It's legal, and the Church of England has got men in it that would marry a man to his grandmother if it were legal. But the best men in the Church don't hold with it: and I don't and never shall. To my mind it don't make much odds whether you wait to be 're-married,' as you call it, or go off with Meredith now. I tell you straight, Kitty, in my eyes you'll never be his wife so long as Eve's alive. Now then."

"That is an extreme view," said Meredith quietly: "entirely unreasonable."

"Maybe," Dent nodded. "But I'm talking to my sister, not to you. You're not a Churchman and don't hold the same opinions that Kitty and I do. You've acted quite straightforwardly according to your lights. The worst that can be said of you is that you're behaving pretty badly to Evelyn. To my mind you've no right to pick his pocket."

Meredith shrugged his shoulders. "Will he care?"

"'Course he'll care. It's a disgrace: a black mark on his name. Evelyn's careless about nine hundred and ninety-nine things out of a thousand, but he's jealous of his name. Rightly, too: it's an old name, and the womenfolk of the family have always been careful of it. They say both Charles II and George II came to Temple Evelyn and were sent off with fleas in their ears. In those days our people were bailiffs on the estate. I've read about Charles's goings-on in Roger Dent's Commonplace Book. 'I have supped well and yet I go hungry,' said the Stuart as he hoisted himself into the saddle—Lawrence Evelyn was holding his stirrup for him and Roger was standing by. 'Oh, my wife,' said Lawrence, 'is famous for sending folk away with a good appetite.'"

"Lawrence Evelyn is dead," said Kitty, "and the fair Dorothy is dead and entirely undistinguished. If she had played her cards better I might be a duchess. But not to make myself out worse than I am—which you irresistibly tempt me to do—let me point out to you that I'm not going to divorce Evelyn for desertion only. I couldn't do it, as I suppose you know, though you never read divorce reports, do you? The law requires other grounds. Edmund thinks they have been given." It irritated her to find that it required courage to call Meredith by his Christian name before her brother. But in her present temper opposition only hardened her. "In that case it would be Evelyn who was answerable for the black mark. Edmund, please tell George on what condition I've promised to go to you."

But Dent was not placated by Kitty's condition.

He got up—"Kitty! this passes. Don't I tell you I asked Evelyn point-blank if he had been faithful to you? 'Neither act nor thought'—that's what he said: and he gave me his word for it. Would Eve lie to me—Eve that never told a lie in his life, not even to Philip, and that I've always felt towards as if he were a young brother of my own? You know better than that."

"Evelyn," Meredith remarked, "may never have had such excellent reason for telling a lie before."

Dent turned on him in anger. "Look here, Meredith, you came to Chelsea as Evelyn's friend."

"And I regret it very much. It puts me in an odious position. But let us qualify our terms: I should not blame him for lying to protect a lady—would you?"

"Edmund thinks," said Kitty, suppressing an irrelevant and untimely wish that Meredith would not always say *a lady* instead of *a woman*, "that Evelyn was not alone at Évol."

Under Dent's light blue level eyes Meredith shifted in his chair. Dent was dismaying shrewd. He gave a short laugh. "Kitty, don't let cats out of bags. Meredith says a lot of things to you that he wouldn't care to repeat to me. That's one of them. You don't believe it, Meredith. You only want to make Kitty jealous. You aren't ass enough to believe he had a woman with him in a four-roomed cottage ten miles from anywhere with no water laid on and no cooking apparatus but a paraffin stove."

Meredith jerked his cigar away. He too was angry now though his manner remained polite: the angrier because, though his reason was honestly convinced that Sophy was at Évol, there lingered in the back

of his mind that stubborn, instinctive doubt. "It seems improbable. But the fact remains that Evelyn hustled you out of the house in under twelve hours and you did not go into all four rooms. You are mistaken if you think I should bring this charge lightly. No, I've no proof: but I have evidence." Rapidly he ran over what he had learnt from Millerand and from Sophy's maid. "No one but Evelyn would have employed this girl as a go-between; nor would even Evelyn, one supposes, have done it if he had not been on intimate terms with her and indifferent to comment."

Dent's heavy, slightly undershot jaw was clenched. "I tell you he gave me his word!"

"So should I, in his shoes. You're so energetic. You would have been capable of going upstairs. . . . I'm no lawyer, but I'm a lawyer's son, and I can't but point out that in a court of enquiry your evidence wouldn't go far. It amounts to this, that we've Evelyn's word for his innocence; and a man's word isn't usually taken for proof. Dent, since you press me, it does seem strange to me that he should have got rid of you in such a hurry. In a queer place like that, a makeshift camp in the woods, the first thing one naturally says is 'Like to look over it?' Evelyn apparently said nothing of the sort. You say you never even saw inside his room."

Dent's face changed. He put his hand before his eyes. Suddenly there had floated back to him the last noise he had heard before going to sleep overnight—the locking of Evelyn's door.

"If I thought that," he said more to himself than to Meredith, "if I thought that, by Heaven . . ."

Meredith eyed him curiously. "What then? he isn't up to your fighting weight, my dear friend—or mine."

"Fight, there'd be no fight . . . but it's impossible. Careless if you like, and as stubborn as—but not treacherous: no, no." Dent straightened himself and braced back his shoulders as if to fling off a burden. In his steady eyes there was more than a shade of contempt. Its injustice angered Meredith, yet he winced under it, for Dent carried heavy guns. Men like Meredith, aware of mixed motives, find it hard to face the indignation, right or wrong, of an upright and equitable mind like that of George Dent. "So that's your opinion, is it? Back it, then."

"How?"

"Come up with me to Évol to-morrow. Repeat to Evelyn's face, if you've pluck enough to do it, what you've said behind his back to me and Kitty: challenge him to clear himself."

"That is quite a good idea," said Kitty. "Do it, Edmund. Let us all know where we stand."

But Meredith did not like the good idea—far from it: Dent could not have hit on a more disagreeable ordeal. It brought a flush to his face. "But, my dear fellow, these are Red Indian methods—the social equivalent of the bowie and the tomahawk! In polite warfare one doesn't go to work so crudely. Are you trying to force a quarrel between me and Evelyn? I'd rather not come to blows."

"There'll be no quarrel, if I know Eve. He can keep his temper if you can't. Be frank with him, since you're so keen on being frank; if you want to steal your friend's wife don't do it behind his back!"

"It's preposterous," said Meredith hotly and without any of the affectation that had become his second nature. "He would kick us both out of the house!"

"You're afraid to face him."

"Afraid to face Evelyn! I?" He laughed, genuinely amused. "My good chap, Evelyn must have altered a lot before I should be afraid to tackle him!"

"Oh, not afraid in that way," said Dent impatiently. "You're not going to come to blows. If there were a row it would be me—but that's neither here or there. 'Afraid' 's the wrong word: what I mean is ashamed."

Meredith stood up. He had not felt so angry since he was a boy, but to quarrel with Dent was impossible. He brushed his way once or twice up and down a ribbon of path threaded in and out of the flowery *patio*, struggling with his incontinent temper, before coming back to the brother and sister who waited for him under the palm arcade. Singularly alike, those two! they had not exchanged a word during his absence, both wore the same placid expression, both were obviously waiting for him to agree to this extraordinary proposal, against which every fibre of his common sense rebelled. Dent too, with his shrewd level head! One would have resigned oneself to a strange whim or two in Kitty—a woman, and a young and pretty woman, and one so strangely placed that almost any disturbance of the situation might do her good and could scarcely do her harm. It would have been easy to consent and subsequently wriggle out of it. But Dent! Once nailed by Dent, wriggling would be both undignified and ineffectual. One would have to go through with the disgusting business . . . Well, Dent was not a man of the world, that was what

was wrong with him. He was bitten with High Church fads: and raging Meredith said to himself that if this was what came of Dent's affection for the Sermon on the Mount, confound him, it was certainly not a religion for gentlemen. An agreeable interview this that he had so coolly mapped out for Meredith—to go to a man who still considered Meredith his friend, and explain to him the terms on which he hoped to steal his wife! "I'll take up your challenge, though it is a foolhardy one, will give Evelyn unnecessary distress, and may lead to mischief. But I accept it as I accepted Kitty's original condition: because she has the right to impose what terms she likes."

"It'll clear up the situation at all events," said Dent rising. "Calling yourself Evelyn's friend, you can't pick his pocket. Fair and square is my motto. I'll turn in now. Kitty, you had better cut off to bed too."

"It's early yet," pleaded Meredith. He would have liked five minutes with Kitty under the *lauriers roses*, even if they had said nothing to each other which Dent might not have heard: he felt jarred and restless, and the longing to be alone with her was strong upon him. He would have been content simply to sit by her without uttering a word. But Kitty shook her head, faintly and compassionately smiling at him.

"Not tonight, Edmund. I agree with George—I had rather Evelyn knew."

## CHAPTER XVIII

"CHARLES."

"What?"

"I only wanted to make sure you were indoors."

"Rather! Why?"

"Just look at the sky."

"Shan't. I'll put you in a corner, Sophy, if you talk to me while I'm working."

Sophy smiled, the frame of mind was healthy; in Chelsea Evelyn would have come out to look at the sky, raging irritation imperfectly disguised under a tense affability. In his newfound peace of mind he could afford to be rude. "Play to me."

"By'n' by."

Sophy sat on the doorstep, her arms about her knees. Her brown hair hung in plaits down her back, her feet were bare, and she wore one of the Shetland dresses that were going to be worn that year, a thin white woollen dress without collar or girdle, the shawl-shaped bodice open over her long ivory throat. She had reached Évol on Thursday afternoon and it was now Friday evening; twenty-four hours had sufficed to peel off her few faint airs of sophistication; she looked like a boy of fifteen, "cool as aspen-leaves" and graceful only with the accidental grace of saplings and grasses. In a French gallery to which few English painters have gained entry, there hangs a painting of a young girl lying face downward on the

turf beside a bonfire, and raised on her folded arms so that the flamelight is reflected on her face and bosom. It is little more than a portrait of Sophy at nineteen: and the critic was right who wrote of it in the *Révue des Deux Mondes* that it is "at once Romantic and Classic; Romantic in its *décor* and in the bravura of the black shadows and orange-coloured lights that shift and quarrel on this ivory flesh, and Greek in the severity of an innocence that knows no shame." Such was Sophy in Paris at nineteen, and in Évol at twenty-nine.

Evelyn got up from his table strewn with manuscript. She heard him moving across the floor and sitting down to the piano. Sounds stole out like the rustling of wet leaves, a dew of music—the prelude to the fifth Act of *Clair de Lune* . . . From it he glided into colder intricacies of Northern harmony, the snoring ripple of tides on a shelving beach, crossed at intervals by great chords that had in them the harshness of a winter wind, plangent and melancholy. Sophy had been too long and sternly trained to commit the indiscretion of asking "What's that?" She was rewarded for her self-restraint.

"Le marin près la meule," Evelyn called out to her. "Swedish."

"Lovely!" said Sophy with an immense sigh.

Then Evelyn began to sing in his light, silken tenor, a slight voice but of agreeable quality, and irreproachable in time, tune, and taste:

"J'entends dans le bocage  
Le rossignol joli,  
Qui dit dans son langage,  
'Les mariés sont unis,

Il n'y a pas de jour si beau  
Que le jour du mariage.  
Il n'y a pas de jour si beau  
Que le jour du mariage.'

Vous l'entendez, Madame,  
Au milieu des plaisirs,  
De ce jour plein de charmes  
Dépend votre avenir.  
Si le chagrin et les ennuis  
Vous tourmentent dans le monde,  
Vous aurez pour vous un ami,  
Vous souffrirez moins ensemble."

The last verse was interrupted by a crash of thunder which came rolling down out of the mountains and made the very wires of the piano vibrate. Evelyn shut the lid and came to the open doorway. "Oh-là-là! yes, that's quite a good sky. We get thunder every ten days up here in the summertime." He sat down by her and lapsed into a companionable silence.

Their world was split into two halves. Overhead the North was blue, the sapphire blue of a French summer evening, and the hillside clothed in cistus and ilex and fir forest, and the alders and acacias that shaded Evelyn's tributary brook, rose up in a fine tracery of green and silver on azure, every spray glowing in the clarity of moist air; but South over the valley and the Pyrenean chain hung a tremendous rain-storm, a medley of black and white clouds rimmed and shot with bronze. The setting sun burst through them flinging down white rays which smote the hills like a swordstroke. Where it fell, cliff and sward

shone out in patches of light as green as verdigris; where its shadow fell, every rocky tower was as black as basalt but for an occasional vein of snow, while the glens were drowned in wild glooms of red or iron-colour. Moment by moment lightning flickered in broad gleams not far off, and the claps of thunder were so loud that one would have thought they came out of the crags; it was difficult to believe that mere air and water could generate such solid and shattering noises. And, while Évol glittered in evening gold, there was among the opposite heights, between broken ladders and shafts of glory tilted by some strange effect of refraction into different angles, one long rift where rain was falling in a great brown curtain scarfed by an arc of iris.

"D'you enjoy a storm, Charles?"

"Yes," said Evelyn contentedly. "Don't you?"

"S'long as I'm not alone I don't mind," replied the candid Sophy. Evelyn laughed and took her hand for consolation as lightly as a child's. But it was no child's hand that turned over and nestled into his clasp, warm fingers enlacing his fingers and soft palm pressed to his palm. Evelyn sat still but with an effort. Her touch affected him in some nameless way, as scents will now and then, or sounds: the same scent as used to come in long ago at one's bedroom window when the limes were out, or the noise of a door that shuts with exactly the same slam and brassy rattle of its handle as the landing door "at home." Such associations cannot always be tracked to covert, and even so Sophy brought Evelyn to the brink of a memory, and left him there. Or was it not a memory at all—not a refrain out of his past, but a prelude of

days to come? It teased him by its vagueness: and yet there was pleasure in it.

Sophy dragged her hand away and propped her chin on her doubled fists. "Look, it's raining like the devil over there and all down by Ria. I declare the river's rising already! It's whiter and louder than it was half an hour ago." She nodded towards the torrent in the ravine, fifteen hundred feet below. "I suppose now you'd like to run down and bathe in it."

"No fear. But I shouldn't mind being up on top under that rainbow. Jolly showerbath, all pink and blue."

"Yes, and get struck by lightning! I want to die in my bed when I do die. It's bad enough at the best of times. Aren't you awfully afraid of death?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"What's the use? One might be if one saw one's way to dodging it: but as we've all done it, or shall have to do it, why funk?"

"Silly old thing!"

For Sophy knew how to draw a man on. Under such bracing comment Evelyn was happy to air his simple philosophy. "Look at all the fellows who were killed in the war, young men with their lives before them, boys fresh from school and shot in their first fight: the first time I saw a lot of dead men together was the last time I bothered my head about death. One lost the sense of loneliness. It would only have been like going over to join one's friends. I've heard other men say the same thing—civilians too."

"Everybody's doing it." Sophy smiled. "The air was so thick with ghosts they kept one another

company. Didn't you mind the war much, then?"

"Rather!"

"Why?"

"Because I didn't like being dirty, and I didn't like being tired, and I couldn't stand the noise of the guns: and I was most dreadfully frightened," Evelyn added, "all the time. No, not of death, but of dying. 'Mal-heureusement, pour être mort, il faut mourir.' Or spoiling my hands so that I couldn't play any more. I never did run away but I always wanted to."

"Most fellows did. I knew a man once, not very young he wasn't, it was when I was in Paris: well, he was my lover if you want to know. I wasn't exactly fond of him, but I let him because I was so sorry for him. He cried in my arms half the night. Yes, it was creepy, but I didn't mind because I could feel it did him good to be with some one that he didn't have to be ashamed before. He's a K. C. B. now." She remained silent for a little time while the lightning thrust and thrust again its crooked steel blade among the sun-sprinkled peaks. "That storm's coming up. I hope it won't rain to-morrow if I've got to go down to Ria in one of those canvas carts. I don't much want to move on. It's been so jolly here. But you want me to clear out, don't you? I don't blame you, with your wife at Perpignan! There'd be the devil of a row if Mr. Dent came up again and caught me here. Funny, wouldn't it be? I think I shall go back to Paris."

"To Paris? Why?"

"Because I'm sick of London. There's no one there I much care for now you're over here and Wright and Hurst are gone to Ireland. I'd like to have some jolly

times again like I used to have, before I get old and lose my looks."

"Don't go back to Paris, Sophy."

"Why not?" said Sophy defiantly. "Being good doesn't pay."

"Thank the Lord, no!" Evelyn murmured. "Why should one bother with it if it did? But it's like the race in *Alice in Wonderland*, you don't get any prize except your own thimble back again: not in this life at all events. In the next, if there is one, who knows? perhaps the revelation of the heart of God. . . . And then 'they shall sit in the orchestra and noblest seats of heaven, that have held up shaking hands in the fire and humanly contended for glory.' "

"I didn't know you were religious," faltered Sophy, when she could get her breath. She was utterly astonished and awestruck.

"I'm not, I'm not! . . . but I rather wish I were. One of these days I should like to write a Passion. But I'm too young yet. Still I've written some church music that wasn't bad. Years ago, when I was at Queens', I wrote a *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* that I rather like, they sing them in King's College Chapel: most English services bang into the major for the Gloria, bim-boum, an awful noise, but I made mine all quiet and golden as if the heavenly choirs were singing under their breath. I mean I tried to. Sophy dear, don't go to Paris."

"I never will, Eve."

"Thank you."

Silence fell again—if it could be called a silence which was so full of inanimate noises: Evelyn contentedly working out in his head the last ten bars of

his Prelude, and Sophy brooding over Evelyn's goodness, which seemed to her quite superhuman. It was at all events free from self-consciousness. Her threat had made him feel distressed and ashamed, but now that she had given him her word he returned happily, secure in it, to *Clair de Lune*. And meanwhile from under her long lashes Sophy watched him with a smile full of pity and love and mockery. Men were so innocent! He was not thinking of her any more. After extorting that promise he had relapsed into his own thoughts, not caring to ask what life it left for her.

"I'm glad I came, though it's a long way to come for a couple of days. Still I've enjoyed it. I've liked seeing you. Say you've liked seeing me—you'll miss me, a little? You'll miss my omelettes, won't you?"

"I shall miss you most awfully. It's odd, but I never seem to mind you," Evelyn added naïvely, "not even when I'm working."

"Not so much as Mr. Dent?"

"Oh, I minded old George like anything! I was immensely pleased to see him, but he blocked up all my sunlight."

"Moonlight," amended Sophy. "D'you know, Eve, I often think there's a sym—sym—symbolicalification, well, you know what I mean, between you and *Clair de Lune*. You've lived in moonlight all your life."

"What's that?" said Evelyn, disturbed. "It sounds rude."

"Never mind. Oh I say, what a flash! It looked right overhead." She jumped up. "Let's go indoors."

Indulgent of her whims, Evelyn followed her in. "Bad little storm, isn't it? Cheer up, let's turn our backs on it, all the naughty weather." He closed the door just as the first great gust of wind came rushing up out of the ravine and shook through the house like thunder. "Better lock it," said Evelyn. "It doesn't fasten well and I can't have my music blowing all over the room. Now shall we shut the shutters up and light the lamp and be cosy?" He hasped the sun-shutters over the only window. After the gold and silver glare of storm and sunset, the room for their dazzled eyes was instantly plunged into midnight. "Now where the mischief did I put those matches?"

"Here."

"Where?"

"Here in my hand."

Evelyn felt for Sophy in the gloom. "Is that you?—Oh, I beg your pardon. Thanks."

He lit the lamp.

Sophy glanced at him furtively. She could read Edmund Meredith like a book, but Evelyn, so transparent, so careless, often puzzled her. That moment in the dark had struck out an electric spark, but what it meant, or what kind of contact it was that had been completed when he touched her, she failed to understand. At all events it was new—it had not happened before in her experience of Evelyn: and it had ruffled him: in the sallow lamplight she saw that he was frowning and his face was pale. Its effect on Sophy, who was not easily embarrassed, was to make her feel keenly conscious of herself and to put her to shame. She picked up her stockings, which were still lying across a chair where she had tossed them that morning

when she first went out over the dew-pearled, dawn-cool turf, and moved shyly towards the staircase.

"Don't put your stockings on," said Evelyn.

"Why not?"

"Pretty feet."

"Rats!" said Sophy. She stood in the doorway, undecided. Again after a dead lull a roaring torrent of wind gushed out, fell on their south wall like a shock of water, and went wailing away up into the hills; while through the narrow, deepset kitchen window there came in the reflection of a flame of lightning that seemed to play over the furniture and dimmed the lamp and quenched the northern blue. Sophy, scared, came hurriedly back, shutting the door behind her and dropping her stockings on the floor. There was no valour in her, none of the strength to make a martyr: she was infinitely more frightened of the storm than of Evelyn. After all, she reflected with her rather mocking smile, the smile of a gamin of Paris, why should she run away from Evelyn? What more could he ask of her than she had come to Évol to offer him?

Sophy was always frank with herself. She had come to Évol to offer Evelyn her beauty and her love, not out of pity, as in the case of the lover who was now a K. C. B., but for love's own sake. It was only since she had seen him again, and had fallen under the fascination which he unconsciously exercised over her, that she had begun to falter and feel shy. She flung off her fanciful constraint now and sat down by the wide brick hearth, listening to the noises of the rising gale, "like swallows in a chimney," and giving up her soul to the sweetness of this companionship

in solitude, though it was only an hour snatched from between two wastes of desolation. Her feet were bare on the worn floor of chestnut-wood, polished smooth by generations of string-soled slippers, but there was no chill in it; everything in the room was warm to the touch, with the dry indoor warmth of a Pyrenean summer, bone-warm beyond reach of bad weather. But the summer's heat was not so warm, so soft, so kindly as Sophy's love.

Evelyn leant against the table watching her—this bit of driftwood that had been thrown at his door. That had been a strange moment when he touched her in the dark; he had felt then through his senses, what hitherto he had scarcely even realised with his mind, that she was his—a discovery which the coldest man cannot make about the plainest woman without emotion; and Sophy was not plain. Hers was that structural beauty which age cannot wither; one could imagine that when she grew old men would still desire to kiss the slight feet, fine as if carved out of ivory, immobile in repose from her long training as a model, and yet an incarnation of running, dancing life. Had they danced their way into Evelyn's heart? The question crossing his mind filled him with dismay. He could not answer it because he was one of those men who never can analyse the springs of sensation, but his sensations themselves were vivid enough, and he knew that when he touched her in the dark he had never felt his manhood so strong in him before.

"Here comes the rain," said Sophy.

It came on the wings of the wind: the dash of it on their glass was like hailstones: the whole house shook and strained. Every door rattled, every lock creaked,

by sash and keyhole and down the wide chimney went whistling draughts that set the lamp jumping and fluttered the heavy manuscript of Evelyn's orchestral score. The flare of lightning was almost unintermittent and displaced the lingering sunset glow behind the window-frame.

"I'm glad we aren't out in it," said Evelyn. "There's not much cover between this and Ria. Lord, how the lightning stares through the chinks in the shutters! Suppose you can't get on to-morrow after all? It doesn't take much to bring down a fall of rock over that Ria road, and if—Hallo!"

"What's that?" cried Sophy, starting forward in her chair.

"Some one coming up the steps—or was it only the wind?"

There came a murmur of voices followed by a loud knock at the door. "Wayfarers, as I live," said Evelyn, springing up. "Poor wretches, they must be half drowned! Fly away upstairs, Sophy, I shall have to let them in and you mustn't be seen."

Sophy was already in retreat, halfway up the winding stair. But she lingered at the turn of it to listen while Evelyn opened the door. "Come in then, my friends," she heard him say—and then silence: a sudden, sharp, breathless silence. Sophy, peering down in great curiosity, could not see the men on the doorstep nor they her, but an appalling suspicion rushed over her as soon as she felt the quality of Evelyn's silence. It meant utter surprise if not dismay.

"Let us in, old man! we're getting wet through."

"But come in of course!" said Evelyn. "I didn't

mean to bar you out, only I couldn't believe my eyes. Have you walked from Ria to-night?" They could not have come from any other direction except by aeroplane, but he scarcely knew what he was saying. "Has it been raining all the way?"

"No, it only came on ten minutes ago. Didn't you hear it? you must have been asleep!"

"No, but—I shut out the storm." He barely saved himself from saying *we*. "Sit down, won't you, George?" He pulled up for Dent the chair that Sophy had been sitting in, still warm from her body. "And you, Meredith . . ."

Evelyn was not one of those fortunate gentlemen who are equal to any crisis. He had not seen Meredith since before the parting from Kitty in Chelsea, and his anger, which had died down into red embers of resentment, leapt up into flame again as the memory of that night rushed over him—but it was tempered by dismay. At the bare thought of Sophy's being discovered by Dent he would have liked to get under the table. "But, George," he burst out, too terrified to be hospitable or even discreet, "what on earth have you come up here *again* for?"

"Gently, gently, old fellow," Dent patted him on the arm. "Meredith's got something to say to you. Now you go ahead, Meredith, I'll see fair play."

Meredith had remained standing, a big powerful figure in his heavy tweeds, wet from head to foot but obviously indifferent to rough weather: overtopping Evelyn in height by a head and shoulders—and in moral force by the old goodhumoured condescension of trained manner and firm will. On his way up from Ria he had not liked the look of the situation—not at

all! but now face to face with Evelyn he suddenly found himself able to take command of it. He measured Evelyn with his keen eye and perceived that he was exceedingly confused and nervous. This weakness was characteristic of the Evelyn of Chelsea and helped to put Meredith at ease and to banish that persistent doubt. . . . He went up to Evelyn and held out his hand, and Evelyn, whose fingers Itched to knock him down, was instantly hypnotised into taking it. Why? Meredith would have had no difficulty in assigning a reason. It was the moral domination of the weak by the strong—not to say of conscious guilt by conscious rectitude.

"Sit down, Evelyn." Evelyn sat down. It was his own house, but he sat down when told to do so by Meredith. "Better come to the point at once, as Dent says. You will guess that I didn't take this journey to admire the scenery. I have something very difficult and disagreeable to say to you, but I may as well warn you at the outset that I am not going to quarrel with you or let you quarrel with me. Dent and I are agreed that when four people"—Evelyn started—"four people are placed as we are, perfect honesty is not only the wisest and safest but the most honourable way out. So now you must forgive me if I seem to intrude on private affairs of yours which are no concern of mine. They are my concern because—sit still—I love your wife."

Evelyn sat still: but his confusion had begun to lift. He felt so curious to learn what would come of this preamble that he almost forgot Sophy's damning presence overhead.

"If I had had the chance of it before she married you—"

"One moment. Does she know you're here?"

"She sent me."

"She did?—Well: go on."

"—I should have done my best to save her from that disastrous mistake. I did not: and the mischief is, partly, irreparable. But you're not living with her. I don't know, nor does Dent, what led to your separation, but it seems to be permanent: you've just refused to return to her. Will you allow me to put before you the obvious aspect of your conduct—the view of it that would strike an average casual observer with no inside information?" Evelyn was incapable of reply. He had begun to feel like a patient in a dentist's chair. "Then I say," Meredith continued firmly, "that, whoever was wrong thirteen months ago, you're wrong now. I am oldfashioned enough to share Dent's view that between husband and wife there ought to be no question of wrongs and rights."

"I wish I weren't in flannels."

"You wish—what?"

"I can't cope with you in those tweeds," Evelyn explained. "Morally, I mean. They give you an unfair advantage."

Meredith was not to be put off by this puerile irrelevance. He had got into his stride now and was enjoying it.

"Your duty is clear. If your wife asks you to return to her, you ought to go."

It was too much. "Thank you," said Evelyn, rousing himself, "your advice is excellent, I dare say, but it is an infernal impertinence for you to offer it. I'll

deal with my wife direct but not through you or even George here."

"But your wife isn't anxious to deal with you direct," retorted Meredith drily, "and if she prefers to send a commissioner you must face him, however distasteful you may find the process. You can't run away. For our old friendship's sake I'll make it as easy for you as possible, but one thing I'm determined on, and that's to have the truth out of you before I return to K— to Perpignan. The issue is clear between us. Will you return to her? you won't—you've already refused. I've warned you where your duty lies, but you shirk it. So be it: but in that case you mustn't complain if your wife claims her freedom to rearrange her life as you're rearranging yours. Have you ever realised how tragic her position is—a young and beautiful woman left stranded with empty hands? It's because a woman of such force and vitality as hers is unfit to live out her life under such conditions, that I've offered her a chance to rearrange it. Now don't misunderstand me," as the patient showed galvanic symptoms of activity: "Kitty and I aren't, as the phrase goes, blinded by passion. We're simply determined to do in cold blood a necessary bit of reconstruction. The first steps will be difficult and dirty, but the discomfort of an initial irregularity is worth facing for all we have to gain."

"What on earth are you driving at, Meredith? you're not going to run off with Kitty, are you?"

"I hope to take her from you."

"Then why the devil," Evelyn broke out furiously, "do you come to me? You don't want my blessing I suppose?"

"Not precisely, my dear Evelyn: but I want your assistance."

"You confounded, cold-blooded sc—"

"Shut up, Eve," Dent hastily interrupted: "and drop it, you, Meredith: why can't you come to the point? Meredith always will talk through his hat. He isn't going to run off with Kitty. What he wants is for her to divorce you and marry him. So far as his lights go he's acting straightforwardly and has her backing and mine. Not that I want her to marry him: on the contrary, it'll be the blackest day of my life if she does. But in coming to you to-night I do back him, for you've behaved pretty foolishly, and anyone that didn't know you as well as I do might say badly too. I'll even go so far as to say that I don't much blame Meredith for wanting Kitty. It's true that she's unhappy: and as for you, my dear old chap, you can't eat your cake and have it too! If you don't look after your wife other men will. Now Meredith."

Meredith could be succinct when he liked. Under the roof of his father the K. C. he had picked up some useful tips for a cross-examination, and he knew the value of taking a nervous witness by surprise.

"What have you done with Sophy Carter?"

"*Sophy?*"

The blood rushed up into Evelyn's pale face. "I—I don't understand you."

"She was your mistress before you married Kitty."

"No! That she never was."

"So you told me before, and I believed you, but I know better now. She was your mistress when Kitty was your wife: while you were all living under one roof."

"That is a lie," said Evelyn, scarlet.

"And since you ran away from your wife you've returned to her, or she to you. Yes, you're innocent, aren't you?" He laughed. "You look it."

Dent half rose. "I'll have no bullying, Meredith—" he began, and then sat down again. With the best will in the world, it was impossible to read indignant innocence into Evelyn's face. He looked unutterably confused and guilty: as was scarcely to be wondered at, since Sophy, through the cracks in the worn flooring, could hear every word they said.

"How on earth did you find out that I—that she—It's not true, not one syllable of it, George! but how did you—"

"Find out that it wasn't true?" Meredith's tone was goodhumoured in its contempt. He had expected Evelyn to put up a better fight, and was relieved but faintly disappointed: it is poor sport to shoot a sitting hen. "From Millerand. I asked him where you were and he referred me to Sophy. It was as clear to him as it was to me that you wouldn't have entrusted your money affairs to a lady of Sophy's calling unless you had the best of reasons for counting on her good will. Disinterested honesty isn't the rule in that class." Evelyn writhed. He dared not bid Meredith lower his voice. "I then went to Sophy's rooms, where I got your address—"

"From—?"

"Fifine: she had seen it on a letter. From her I also learnt that Sophy had left England to join you. My good chap, don't you know that girls like Sophy always talk to their maids?"

Evelyn went to the window, flung open the shutter,

and leaned his arms on the sill. It had grown dark during the last half-hour, for the sun had gone down behind the Pyrenean sierras, and immense clouds, turbulent and swollen, had come up over the whole sky, blackening the landscape under their wings. The lightning-flashes had grown rarer, quenched in drenching rain; every hillside streamed with water, every cranny was a torrent, every lip of rock a spout; dim in the valley bottom the river went roaring down in a spate of snow. And, like the dying storm, passion in Evelyn had begun to die down into sadness. What a wreck he and Kitty had made of their marriage! and he had meant so well when he married her. Clear sunlit moments of their life together floated back to him—Kitty in the railway carriage lifting down her chinchilla scarf, Kitty's inimitable courage under her bright blush, Kitty's thick fair hair blown across his eyes. And now . . .

What right had he to be angry with Meredith for misjudging him? None: his own indiscretion had been very great. What right even to resent the relations that apparently existed between Meredith and Kitty? None—it was as natural for Meredith to desire Kitty's love as for Kitty to desire her freedom. And fantastically he found himself for a moment almost regretting that no freedom was possible for her, almost sharing her disappointment, yes, and Meredith's too. Meredith thought Evelyn weak: and so he was, if it is weak to shrink from giving pain even to an enemy. His delicacy was the more unwilling to wound Meredith because it had felt every shade of insolence in Meredith's manner to him.

He turned round from the window. "I am most

awfully sorry for all this, Meredith. Sorry I lost my temper. You've come up here to tell me how fond you are of Kitty, and to ask me if I've forfeited my right to her, because we used to be friends and you don't want to do anything underhand. I do thank you for being so honest with me. But, you see, there's nothing in it after all! I suppose to a Frenchman like Millerand it must seem strange that Sophy and I should be simply friends, the best of friends, and nothing more, but so it is—I wrote to her because she knows Millerand and because she was the only person I could think of that was safe not to give me away. I'd have written to Dimmie only that I knew Kitty can wind him round her finger. Or to you if—if—It's true what I told George on Wednesday, I never have given Kitty the chance of a divorce: never, on my honour!"

"Will you swear it?"

For the second time he made Evelyn turn scarlet. Dent interposed.

"It's easy to see you're a lawyer's son, Meredith. Eve's word is good enough for me and Kitty."

"But not for Meredith. He has no title to be answered, but I choose to answer him," said Evelyn haughtily. "Yes, I swear it."

"Prove it."

"How?"

"Let me, or let Dent if you prefer it, search the place."

Extreme and imminent danger, which unnerves many men, gave Evelyn boldness. Like lightning came his counter-stroke. "Surely you don't imagine that I have her hidden on the premises? What an

absurdity! Search it if you like, but I can give you plainer proof than that. Because I owe you some kindness in the past," he crossed to the hearth, "read this: it's Sophy's last letter to me." It was lying on the chimneypiece. Meredith's face darkened strangely as he turned over the envelope. "Notice the date: by the postmark you'll see it wasn't posted till the fourteenth, barely a week ago. Does it sound as if I were her lover? Read it aloud: Dent had better know what's in it, and I'm certain that he never will read it for himself."

It was the letter that Meredith had found in Sophy's bureau, and which Joséphine, after his departure, had put into the post. He recognised the envelope at a glance, but he dared not dispute it, for his hands were tied by his own behaviour—he could not say "I myself found this letter in Sophy's locked drawer after she was gone." And throbbing with anger he had to read it out in his cold, indifferent voice, a piece of evidence which if it had not happened to be worthless would have been conclusive, for it certainly was not the letter of a woman to her lover; from the "Dear Charles" to the "Yours affectionately, Sophy," there was scarcely a word in it but practical business detail of her dealings with Millerand, past and to come. Dimsdale Smith himself could not have written in a cooler vein.

When he had finished, Dent took the envelope out of his hand.

"Postmarked in Chelsea, the fourteenth. Isn't that the day after you were at the flat—that is, after Miss Carter had, according to you, left London to join Evelyn?"

Meredith could not trust himself to answer. He felt

certain that he had been tricked, and tricked deliberately, but his hands were tied. He would have liked to wring Evelyn's neck: in an age of polite warfare this desire had to be repressed, but the effort of repressing it took every inch of strength in the will of the cold-tempered, careless man. He threw down the letter and turned away.

"Bit of a discrepancy, isn't there?" said Dent. "A mistake we'll call it if you like, but it takes a lot of goodwill to make a mistake like that. No need to rub it in—but I'm afraid you've lost the toss, Meredith."

"Have I?"

Dent, who had never forgiven Meredith for what he regarded as treachery to a friend, shrugged his shoulders and linked Evelyn's hand through his arm. "I'm afraid Kitty'll think so. That's what comes of being too clever. She never would have suspected you, Eve, old chap, if Meredith hadn't been so cocksure, which was natural enough no doubt, but doesn't always pay in the long run. Now look here, Meredith: you owe Evelyn an apology, and unless you want me to drop you, and Kitty too, I'm going to see you make it. Own up: you were wrong, weren't you? You're satisfied now that Evelyn hasn't got a woman hidden in the house?"

"No," said Meredith. "Evelyn, whose are these?"

In the yellow lamplight he held up Sophy's silk stockings, left on the floor in her hurried flight.

Dent dropped Evelyn's arm. "*Eve!*"

"You have my word," said Evelyn.

"They belong to your wife, perhaps," suggested Meredith politely.

"*Eve! Eve, old chap!*" Dent was white with

terror. "It isn't possible! Your word of honour . . . you that have always been like my brother. . . . Eve, you couldn't do it: you never would have tricked me like that?"

"Perhaps they're his own," said Meredith. "Shall we try them on him?" He laughed and tossed the stockings on the piano. "My dear Dent, you can continue if you like to take the immaculate Evelyn's word—if his aspect inspires you with confidence. I've too much at stake. I'm going over the house."

"By heaven you shan't," said Evelyn. He set his back to the door.

"Hold him, we don't want a fuss," said Meredith, seizing Evelyn by one arm. Dent, ashy white but stern, interlocked the other. Both were by far the stronger men, and between them Evelyn could not put up any fight at all. Within thirty seconds he was jerked out of the way and thrown down. Meredith ran up the stairs, and Dent, after one glance to make sure that Evelyn was not hurt, followed him. Meredith opened the door of the room Dent had slept in. It was empty and in its original bare disorder; except that the bed had been made up, there was not a vestige left of Sophy's tenancy. "There's no one," said Dent, "there can't be: Eve would never . . . I've known him all my life!"

"Try the opposite earth," said Meredith with his habitual coolness.

He lifted Evelyn's latch, but the door refused to open. Meredith silently pointed out to Dent that no light shone through the wards of the keyhole. The key had been turned from the inside.

"Let us in, Sophy," said Meredith in his strong

voice. "No one's going to hurt you. It is Edmund Meredith and George Dent."

There was no answer. Meredith rapped with his knuckles. "Come! open the door like a sensible girl. We know you're there, and if you don't unlock it we shall only have to break it down."

But still no reply came and no noise. "The room's empty," said Dent.

"Lend me your stick," said Meredith. He took it out of Dent's hand—a solid English mahogany walking stick topped with a silver knob—clubbed it and struck two or three smashing blows with it which had all the weight of his temper behind them. The wood-work held fast but the rickety lock bent and tore out of the jamb, and the door shot open with a violence that laid it flat back on its hinges. Then the two men found themselves looking into Evelyn's bedroom. It was almost bare of furniture and rigidly neat. An oaken locker served as washstand and dressing table, a bracket and curtain formed his wardrobe; there was no mirror but a shaving glass nailed to the wall. In front of the window was drawn up an iron camp bedstead, hard and narrow enough for a monk. But across a couple of chairs were strewn the contents of Sophy's suitcase, toys in gold or ivory and filmy brilliancies of a more intimate nature which with the best intentions she had collected and carried in at lightning speed. She had foreseen that Dent and Meredith would have to share her room that night, and that Evelyn would give up his own to her. She had done what she could to stave off discovery—but success had not attended her efforts. And cringing, blushing, almost crying, she cowered between Evelyn's

three-foot bedstead and open window, the rain and gale thrashing in over her white dress, an image of distress and shame.

"Sophy!" said Meredith letting fall the walking stick in his amazement. "It *is* you!"

He knew then that in his heart of hearts he had not, to the very end, believed that they would find any woman there.

"Yes, me!" Sophy cried, raising her head in a sudden furious defiance. "What about it? But of course you'd think I couldn't stay here and not be Charles's mistress. If it was you I should be yours, shouldn't I?"

"Loyal to the last, these wretched creatures," said Dent. He leant against the door, sick with horror. "Loyal to that—that . . . And Kitty too, that never would own up why she left him . . . ."

"'Tisn't true, but what's the good of saying so?" Sophy murmured bitterly. "Not that it matters what you think of me—I'm only a lump of studio dirt, that's pretty plain now; if I'd had the pluck of a mouse I'd have jumped out of the window."

"Come on," said Dent, "let's get out of this."

He picked up the stick that Meredith had let fall and followed him out of the room, shutting Sophy into it. Then going down with Meredith into the parlour Dent shut that door too behind him. Evelyn stood by the table waiting for them. All the preparation that he had made for facing them was to put away the manuscript of *Clair de Lune*. He was quite helpless: not only were they two to one, but either of them singly would have been more than his match. Dent came up to him and stood looking down

at him without a trace of anger or any other feeling in his light stern eyes except bewilderment.

"We've seen that girl upstairs," he said at length, quietly and without touching Evelyn. "She was in your bedroom. You've deceived me, and, what's worse, you've deceived Kitty. Now you're not going to get off with the shame of being found out. You wouldn't feel it. You're going to get what you will feel. I'll make you feel before I've done with you."

"I never deceived you, George."

"Stop it. Don't you dare call me that," said Dent. He forced Evelyn down across the table. "Hold his wrists, Meredith, if he twists about. It'll save time: and I don't want to mark him."

Sophy in the room above, in which every breath was audible, crouched on the floor with her arms over her head. But there was little to hear: no struggle, no movement of furniture: not one sound from Dent, or from Evelyn, except an occasional gasping sigh: nor from Meredith, standing with his back to the fireplace, grimly approving Dent's performance of a fraternal duty, though he would rather not have done it himself. But he felt constrained to confess that he could not have done it better. He had to interfere in the end, touching Dent's arm.

"That'll do, Dent. You don't want to kill the poor devil."

"There's no danger. I haven't given him so much as all that."

"Your wrist is like a sledgehammer." He raised Evelyn's head. "He's all right but he's had enough. Put him in a chair, unlock the door, and let's go."

"What, and leave that girl here?"

"Well, you don't propose to take her with you, do you?" Meredith said with a laugh which was not quite steady. To him the scene, though necessary, had been distasteful, though he hated Evelyn. Not so to Dent, who had loved Evelyn all his life like a younger brother: in him there was neither pity nor disgust—he was simply satisfied as at a cleared score, and that a heavy one.

Meredith lifted Evelyn not ungently and laid him down in Sophy's chair. "What would his matinée audiences say to us if they could see him now?" Again his laugh was unsteady, and Dent glanced at him sharply.

"You had better have a tot of brandy, there's a bottle on the shelf."

"Don't mind if I do," said Meredith.

He drank from the flask and set it down on the table; caught up his cap, unlocked the parlour door, and called up the stairs: "Sophy."

"What?" said Sophy, standing in Evelyn's doorway.

"Come down: Evelyn wants you."

"You haven't killed him then, between you?"

"There is good blood in you somewhere," said Meredith oddly, "or you'd have interfered."

"Mind you tell Mrs. Evelyn how brave you've been, that's all. She'll love to hear how you held him down for Mr. Dent to beat him."

"Come along now," said Meredith, ignoring Sophy. "We shall have a devil of a wet walk back to Ria. Darkish, too." He hesitated on the step. "It does seem rather rough luck to leave her alone with him. You have half killed him, you know."

But Dent, in the satisfaction of duty done, was

indifferent and even cheerful. Always trim, he had only lingered to shake himself down into his disordered clothes, settling his cuffs and giving a little pull to his waistcoat, which during his late exertions had worked up into a wrinkle under his arms. "They can look after each other," he said, going out into the night without a second glance at Evelyn: "she must be used to rows by this time, a hussy like that."

## CHAPTER XIX

“SOPHY.”  
“Yes.”

“Where are you? Why don’t you come here?”

Sophy descended the stairs slowly, a step at a time, her hand lingering on the rail. “I thought you mightn’t want me,” she said, lingering again on the parlour threshold, her head hanging down.

“I want some brandy,” said Evelyn. “Like Meredith. I shouldn’t have thought he was so ‘squeamish. Give me some, will you? It’s on the table. Rinse it: he drank out of the bottle.”

Sophy carried the flask into the kitchen and rinsed the lip of it with a wet cloth; found a cup and filled it half full of Monsieur Blanc’s excellent cognac. Again she halted in the doorway. “Am I to come in?”

“Lord! don’t make such a fuss,” said Evelyn irritably. Sophy came up to him then and held out the cup. But he turned his head away, felt for his handkerchief, and spat out a mouthful of blood. “Pah! get me some water first, there’s a dear girl. What are you looking so white for? It’s nothing: my mouth’s cut.”

Sophy fetched him a bowl from the kitchen, a jug of water, and a glass. His cheek had been cut, not by Dent but in the rough and tumble with Meredith before they went upstairs, and was bleeding on the inside. Leaning his head on his hand, Evelyn waited

for the flow to cease. "This water's warm. Run down to the brook, will you, and get me some that's properly cold?"

That he seemed to have forgotten the storm was the only sign he gave of mental confusion. It was still pouring in torrents, and the rain streaming off that steep hillside had turned the mule-track into a water-course. Sophy in her draggled dress and still bare-foot splashed through it stolidly. It did not signify to her: so far as it came home to her at all, she felt a vague pleasure in getting wet for Evelyn and under Evelyn's orders. Ice cold, she brought him water that was half foam: the brook, which normally ran along a conduit to feed an aqueduct, had burst bounds and was rushing in a cataract all across the road. "They'll be pretty wet before they reach Ria," Sophy remarked.

"Who?"

"Meredith and Mr. Dent."

"I hope they will, confound them!" Evelyn muttered.

He washed out his mouth with Sophy's water, which distilled in mist on the warm glass, and drank off neat a teacupful of brandy. "That's better. Ouf! I'll go and lie down for a bit. My brother-in-law has a heavy hand. Just give me your arm, will you? Here, chuck over that jacket of mine." Sophy gave him the incongruous white and green blazer which was all he ever wore at Évol, and Evelyn with a wry twist of the lip pulled it over his shoulders and stood up, leaning heavily on her arm. She thought he would have fainted before she got him to the door, but he reached it safely in the end, and exchanged her sup-

port for the balustrade, by which he succeeded in dragging himself up as far as the turn of the stair: the rest of the journey—a short one, fortunately—was performed on his hands and knees. But when he got to his feet on the landing he reeled like a drunken man. “Sophy!”

“What?”

“Come up. Help me!” said Evelyn impatiently. Throwing his arm round her neck and leaning most of his weight on her, he stumbled over to his bed and dropped across it helpless. Sophy unlaced his espadrilles and pulled them off. No protest following, she raised his legs and shifted him, gingerly, into an easier attitude: then darting into her own room pulled open drawer after drawer of the big press and rummaged through them till she found Madame Blanc’s store of linen sheets and pillowcases. Coarse they were, but pure linen, and choosing the finest she tore it swiftly into strips. The miscellaneous experiences of her Paris life served her well now: Dent was right—this was not the first fight she had seen, nor the first time it had fallen to her lot to bind up the vanquished. She was timid with Evelyn not because the spectacle of blood and blows frightened her, but from an intuitive sympathetic shyness, the same instinct as had kept her upstairs when she would have given her soul to go down and fling herself between the quarreling men. She might have protected Evelyn: but how he would have hated to owe his safety to a girl! No, let the men settle their own scores! Even now when she was alone with Evelyn, though it made her so happy to minister to him, she was terrified of displeasing him. She came shyly back with a coil of rough dress-

ings in her hand: "Say, d'you mind—will you l-let me—?"

"L-let you?" Evelyn mocked her. "My dear girl, this delicacy is out of place! Do make the best job of me you can—I'm sorry to bother you, but I don't want to be laid up, and I feel as though that confounded ass George Dent had taken some of my skin off." He raised himself on one arm while Sophy fetched a sponge and basin and deftly set to work. "How dark it is!" said Evelyn presently. "Light my candle, won't you? . . . Hallo!"

"What?"

"What's the matter with your dress?"

"It's wet," Sophy explained indifferently. "I got wet."

"Going to the brook for my water! Of all the—O Sophy, I clean forgot the storm!"

"No, no! it wasn't that, I was wet before that."

"How on earth—?"

Sophy nodded towards the window, which was still open: driving in unchecked, the rain had made a wide puddle on the floor. "I knew they'd have to sleep in my room," she explained, when she had taken her safety-pin out of her mouth, "so I scurried in here and carried all my things across. Then when Mere-dith found my stockings (Lord! I *was* a scatterbrain to leave them behind), I knew he'd search the house and that the only thing to do was to jump out of the window. But there wasn't time then to get back into my own room without being seen and jump out of my own window where the hill runs up, and here in front it's a longish drop—and the stone steps don't give you much of a chance. I did put one leg over the sill but

I couldn't get the other to go after it. I told you I was a coward."

"And a good job too! What, jump out of that window fifteen feet down on the stones? I never heard such madness. You might have broken your back!"

"Nought never comes to harm," said Sophy with her fugitive, shadowy smile.

He fingered the dripping sleeve. "You're wet through. Go into your room and—have you a dress to change to?"

"No. I left almost all my clothes in my trunk at Ria. I'm all right, Charles darling! don't you worry your old head about me."

"Right, are you? you'll be as right as rain if you catch rheumatic fever. Go and—oh bother!"

Trying to rise, he had overtaxed his strength. Sophy twisted her fingers together and turned away, not daring to watch him in his weakness, though the tears were in her eyes: cool as he was, and unpretentiously cool, without strain or bravado, he could not have gone through that scene in the parlour without some bitter sensations. Behind her back, Evelyn furtively touched his forehead with his handkerchief: it was wet and his lips were pale, but his voice remained natural and firm.

"Go to that locker and pull out the second shelf from the top. You'll find a lot of my things in it, a shirt, some clean flannels, a tie that I wear to Ria. Take an outfit and put them on. My trousers will be a bit too long for you but you can tuck 'em up."

"But I can't wear your trousers!"

"Oh Lord, I suppose you've never had on a pair of

bags before!" said Evelyn impatiently. "Take 'em and do as you're bid. You can stick my dressing gown on top of them if you're so shy. And put your stockings on, do: it isn't the middle of the day now and there's often a freshness after one of these storms."

Rather unwilling, but docile, Sophy carried off an armful of dry flannels. She had begun to feel the drag and chill of her wet clothes and was not sorry to get out of them, although, strangely enough, she was shy of borrowing Evelyn's. Strangely, because she could remember many a studio frolic when she had been less particular! But now she had to console herself with the reflection that it really wasn't her fault, she was only obeying orders—Evelyn, as a rule the most deprecating of men, had for once got fairly into the imperative mood, and she had not the heart to oppose him. She had just buttoned herself into a white flannel jacket, and was turning up the hems that fell down over her ankles, when Evelyn called to her again, in a startled voice. Sophy ran to him, muffling herself in his dressing gown on the way. Evelyn during her absence had apparently shaken off a good deal of his faintness; his face was not so ghastly pale, and he was sitting up, propped on one arm.

"There's another party knocking at the door! It never rains but it pours, does it? Just stick your head out of the window and see what he looks like."

Sophy knelt down by the low sill and craned her neck over it. "The rain's lifted but it's so dark I can't see—Oh!"

"Who is it?"

"Meredith."

"Nonsense!"

"It is, then: d'you think I don't know Meredith?"

"Is Dent with him?"

"No, but he may be waiting in the road. I can't see much beyond the light from the parlour window."

"Sophy! Sophy!"

Guarded but urgent, Meredith's whispered cry came up to them from below. Sophy watched him go and peer through the window into the empty sitting room, then come back and try the door again. It was unlocked, but he stood hesitating as if afraid to enter. "Ask him what's up," said Evelyn.

Sophy leant over the sill. "Meredith, what d'you want?"

"A lantern or flash, if you have such a thing, and a coil of rope."

"What in the world for?"

"There's been an accident."

"Oh! Is Mr. Dent hurt?"

"No. Come down and see if you can find them, will you? I suppose you know where they're kept."

Sophy made a fleeting grimace. "As I said before, I've only been in the house twenty-four hours; still I'll try."

She turned, to find Evelyn on his feet and re-lacing his shoes. "Charles! you mustn't—you can't walk about. Let me—"

"You can't. You wouldn't know what to do," said Evelyn. "Shut up, Sophy, and don't make a fuss. I've broken no bones and moving about won't hurt me. In plain English I've had a devil of a thrashing, but if you think I'm going to lie up because of it you're jolly well mistaken." He hurried downstairs, his step

growing firmer as he pulled his strength together. Meredith was still waiting on the doorstep; apparently he felt delicate about re-entering Evelyn's house. When the door was opened by Evelyn himself, Sophy's extempore bandages ruling a transverse pattern under his thin shirt, Meredith gave an irrepressible and violent start.

"Here, come in, do. What's happened?"

Meredith had to conquer an immense disinclination to set foot a second time in Evelyn's parlour. "I want a length of rope and a lantern. Dent has had a fall; he's not hurt and there's no danger, but I can't get him up because I can't see what I'm doing. There has been a bit of a landslide across the Ria road, a fall of rock that has carried down a bit of the coping; trying to scramble over it in the dark, he went too near the edge and it gave way under him."

"But where is he?"

"On a ledge: not far below, but everything's running with water and as slippery as glass. I tried to reach him but he warned me off; said I should bring half the hillside down on top of him."

"Sapristi!" muttered Evelyn.

He vanished into the kitchen, where Meredith heard him giving rapid directions—still in the imperative mood.

"Sophy, do you know how to light a fire on that open hearth in the parlour? . . . Good girl! There's a shed in the yard where you'll find a lot of dry wood and fircones, and here are my matches. Use paraffin if there's any surface wet on the faggots. In that cupboard you'll find a tin of soup: hack it open—there's a what-you-may-call-it on the shelf—and

hot it up. Put a drop of milk to it. Then get your blankets down and warm them."

"But you can't—you'll hurt yourself—!"

Turning a deaf ear to Sophy's lamentation, Evelyn came back with a coil of thin strong rope in his hand. It was what Monsieur Blanc had used for cording bales on his hay-wain. "This long enough? it's all I have so we must make it do." He thrust an electric torch into the breast of his shirt. "Can you stow away the brandy? We may want it, and it's not so likely to break in the pocket of your thick tweeds." He was hurrying out when Meredith caught his arm.

"Give me the cord and the torch. You're not fit to go."

Evelyn flushed scarlet and freed himself with a fierce jerk. "Fit or not, I must go. You don't know these hills."

"I recognise your pluck, Evelyn, but you would be more trouble than you were worth. I beg your pardon, but you can hardly stand."

"Compliments afterwards. Oh! come on, do. How long do you suppose that loose shingly stuff will hold? It may fetch loose at any moment: and it's fifteen hundred feet to the torrent."

"Good Heavens!" said Meredith aghast.

Unacquainted with the country, and preoccupied with the odious necessity of going back to Évol, he had not realised that Dent was in danger. He had taken for granted that so long as Dent kept quiet he was safe. But what safety could there be on those crumbling slopes, if one came to think of it, for anything larger than a goat? Frightened into acquiescence, he followed Evelyn out into the night.

It was by now dark: on an ordinary evening it would still have been twilight, but the clouds that had come up with the storm were such as make candles burn bright at noonday. The rain had stopped, but everything was streaming wet, and the valley bottom was a black gulf through which the Ria torrent roared like surf on a pebble strand. When they reached Evelyn's tributary brook he produced his torch and they had to go carefully. It had brought down a quantity of big stones which were strewn all over the roadway, and where they dammed the channel it swirled like a cataract, almost knee-deep. Evelyn in his weakness could hardly stand up under it. Meredith silently offered him a hand.

"Thanks," said Evelyn, impassively accepting it.

"Take my arm, won't you?"

"I will if you don't mind."

In after years that walk lingered in Meredith's memory like a bad dream—one of those dreams of wide flooding when the habitable world seems to be resolving itself, amid the unutterable confusion and anxiety of the dreamer, into a single element. The splash of puddles underfoot, the universal murmurous ripple of thousands of runnels coming down over invisible heights, the wan gleam of an occasional lightning flash which spilt itself among distant clouds like a pool of white water among black rocks, the precipices and tossing peaks which for a moment opened out under it clear as day and rough as an unquiet sea, the nightmare conflict between having to hurry to rescue Dent and not being able to hurry because they could not without stumbling put one foot before another, above all the discomfort of feeling that light but painful

weight on his arm—confused yet intense impressions, they were of those that pierce below the normal registration strata and leave their print on the mind for ever. Chief among them was distress on Evelyn's account: but he dared not give it utterance.

"Hallo! is this the place?"

Evelyn held up his torch and flashed it across the chaos ahead of him. They had gone about a kilometre on the mule-track to Ria, and had reached a spot where it rounded a great bluff in a hairpin curve, a headland of rock hanging over it, a stark torn cliff dropping down from it into abysmal gloom. This turn, always dangerous for carts and horses, had been protected by thirty or forty yards of stone coping. But wind or rain or lightning had split the rock overhead, most of the coping had gone down headlong into the ravine, and what remained of the road was buried under thousands of tons of raw red soil, boulders, uprooted firtrees, shreds of turf, and blackened shards of limestone, which when the small round beam from Evelyn's torch danced over them looked like raw flesh and bones of earth, or débris left over from its creation.

"Dent! Dent! are you all right?"

"Right as rain," Dent's voice floating up from below sounded rather thin and exhausted through the wailing gusts of wind. "But be careful, I can't stretch about. Can you see me?"

"No. Where are you?"

"On my right, that's Ria way, there's a goodsized firtree sticking out with its heels in the air. On my left nothing but a gigantic rubbish heap. Right

overhead a big boulder that looks beastly loose. I can't see anything under me at all."

"Has your firtree a split trunk like an L? . . . All right. Hold on half a minute."

"Well, hurry up, there's a good chap, I feel awfully near slipping."

No time had been lost, for, while Meredith was trying to locate Dent, Evelyn had been making the rope fast to a bit of unbroken coping, and tying knots in it and a loop at the end for Dent to slip over his head. "Ask him if he can manage the rope by himself," Evelyn prompted Meredith. "It's full long enough to chuck over."

"Yes, if you can hit me off," Dent called back in his goodhumoured cool tone. "But I can't go looking for it. This ledge is about fifteen inches wide and feels shaky, also I've strained my right shoulder pretty badly—ugh!"

"What's wrong?" Meredith asked, swiftly flinging out the rope in what he judged to be the right direction—"Here you are."

The rattle of a couple of pebbles, which ran on and on down the cliff and never stopped till they rolled out of earshot, made Dent's danger appallingly plain. "Bit sensitive, this old ledge," the voice was weaker now, "doesn't seem to like me to sit up on it. . . . Send down the rope for goodness' sake!"

"I have sent it down."

"I haven't got it."

"I must go down," said Meredith, swiftly hauling in the rope.

"No, I," said Evelyn: "you're too heavy."

"Evelyn, you can't!"

"I must. Your athletics are a thing of the past: you weigh twice what I do and you're out of training. I'm used to these hills and I can climb about them like a fly."

"That won't mend matters if you faint," said Meredith bluntly.

"I never faint."

He pulled the loop over his head. Meredith would have given the world to insist, but dared not, for Dent's sake: he was too heavy and his muscles had lost their spring. All he could do was to pay out the rope, while Evelyn, his torch in one hand, threw his leg over the parapet and scrambled warily down from boulder to boulder, a round disk of light dancing ahead of him and lighting up every tuft of wet grass and every pebble on his road. Torch or no, Meredith could have tracked him by the noise he made, for at each step earth and stones went rolling, rolling out of earshot.

"Where are you?" Dent's voice was very feeble now. "What are you doing?"

"Bringing down the rope."

"Who is it?"

"Evelyn."

"*Evelyn?* . . . Don't come down. Keep back—for God's sake keep back! this shelf is rocking under me. Throw me the rope."

"Can't, there's a branch in the way."

"Then I'm done. Don't come any nearer, I'm going. O God!— Say goodbye to Kitty for me. Eve, you fool, keep back, it's cracking—"

Evelyn sprang for it. He crashed through a network of twigs and fell on his hands and knees on the

lip of rock where Dent was lying. It broke under him with a roar like thunder, but as it split and crumbled he got hold of Dent by a leg and an arm and held him by his grip on Dent's clothes. For one appalling moment they seemed to drop with a dropping universe; and then the loop pulled taut under Evelyn's armpits, the hillside below came rushing up to meet them, Dent dug in his fingers and toes, and slowly, panting, dripping with sweat, groaning aloud with the anguish of his wrenched shoulder, Dent got his weight off Evelyn and Evelyn shifted the loop over Dent's head.

"That was a good bit of cord," Dent remarked soberly.

Dirty, wet, and bleeding, he sat in the road, his head on Meredith's knee; the loosely cut tweed coat was already strained tight over his swollen shoulder. Evelyn, a step or two away, was coolly unknotting the rope from the parapet and coiling it over his arm. Meredith alone was not cool. It had irked and mortified him to have to stand by inactive, he had been frightened out of his life when the rock cracked, and he was afflicted by scruples which his companions did not seem to share. "Confound it all," he burst out, "what are we to do? How am I to get you to Ria in this state?"

"To Ria?"

"There'll be no cart or diligence—no conveyance of any sort to be had on a night like this: and even to-morrow there'll be this infernal road blocked—and you can't walk ten miles—what is to be done?"

Evelyn opened his eyes. "You were not thinking of pushing on to Ria to-night?"

"Where else can we go?"

"Why, back to Évol, of course. You're woolgathering, Meredith."

"To Évol?" Meredith repeated stupidly.

"George can get as far as that if we each give him an arm: can't you, George?"

"But we can't go to Évol!"

"Oh, rubbish!" said Dent, "there's no getting on to Ria to-night nor yet to-morrow for me. I feel done to the world and I want this coat cut off me. Eve'll give us a room."

"But of course!" said Evelyn laughing. "What are you dreaming of? Didn't you hear me tell Sophy to get soup and hot blankets ready? We had better get a move on, too, George ought to be in bed."

"But—!"

"But what? If it's the commissariat problem that bothers you, pray set your mind at rest. I always keep ten days' iron rations in the larder since one depressing occasion last winter when I was snowed up and lived for a week on rice and jam." He stooped to help Dent to his feet. "Come along, old fellow, the sooner you're between the sheets the better."

"But—!" said Meredith for the third time and as unavailingly as before. He felt bewildered, as if set down to play in a game of which he had never learnt the rules. It was all very well for Evelyn to be magnanimous (confound him!) after saving Dent's life, but what was Dent doing? Had he so soon forgiven Evelyn? Forgiveness apart, wasn't the situation a trifle delicate, a trifle awkward? How could

Dent go to Évol and accept the hospitality of Evelyn —or of Sophy?

But Dent with his delusive simplicity seemed to find nothing indecent in what was inevitable. It had to be, therefore it ought to be, and he was not going to boggle at it. He got up slowly and stiffly, grunting like one of his own cows, and dividing his weight between Meredith and Evelyn.

"That was something like a storm, my word! I'm glad I don't get storms like that on top of my harvest. It'd lodge the crops as if a steam roller had gone over them. No, it's no mortal use your fussing, Meredith, you couldn't get to Ria to-night not if it was to attend your own wedding!"

## CHAPTER XX

NOW began an interlude which seemed to Meredith as strange and as completely out of touch with their life before and after it as the time spent by shipwrecked sailors on a desert island; and the stranger because his companions were content apparently to take all for granted and settle down together as if they meant to stay at Évol till they died. To move Dent was impossible; he turned out to have broken two ribs as well as spraining his shoulder, and was light-headed for a few nights, with a temperature of a hundred and three. It would hardly have been safe to get him to Ria even in an ambulance, still less in a farm cart, and in point of fact no vehicle of any kind was available till a breakdown gang had been sent up to clear the landslide and restore communication by road. While that was doing they were almost cut off from their neighbours, for the only way down from Évol was by footpath over the hills. Evelyn departed at dawn, sent a telegram to Kitty, and brought back a medical man on a high-shouldered, mild-eyed mule, who praised Sophy's dressing of the damaged side, and ordered Dent to keep quiet and live on strong broth and *tisane* (a febrifuge of the country brewed from lime-leaves, and perhaps the mildest drink that ever was quaffed from a teacup); after Monsieur Bailbé left again, there was nothing to do but wait. Dent and Meredith shared the big room at the back of the inn, Sophy was put into Eve-

lyn's bedroom, and Evelyn slept on the kitchen floor. By tacit consent, the collision between Dent and Evelyn was ignored as though it had never happened.

Evelyn being host and householder, the control of the situation was for him to take, and to the irritation and bewilderment of Meredith he took it! He it was who mapped out their duties for them, sitting on the edge of the parlour table and gravely making notes on a chart which was afterwards nailed to the wall: Sophy to do most of the cooking, and act as nurse by day and occasionally by night, sleeping with her door open and going in and out to minister to Dent when Meredith called her; Meredith to sally forth with a gun or a fishing net, and bring in rabbits and pigeons and *grives* and an occasional *izard*, or a trout ignominiously hauled ashore in defiance of Waltonian etiquette—Meredith who had never in all his life before attacked a trout with anything but a fly!—and Evelyn himself to do the ordinary work of the house, sweeping and washing and fetching wood and water with the energetic neatness of a well-drilled batman. Meredith used to hear him whistling about his duties as if it were his chief pleasure in life to scrub the parlour floor. Dust thickened on the lid of the shut piano. The unfinished MS. of *Clair de Lune* was stacked out of harm's way in an empty biscuit tin. And Evelyn was not often seen to cast regretful glances on it; the tune to which he blacked Meredith's boots (for the amenities of life were not neglected) was

A blue and white young man  
(Believe it if you can!)  
A "What's the next article?"  
(Don't care a particle!)  
Howell and James' young man!

Which was all very well for Evelyn but left Meredith fuming.

What chiefly mystified him were the relations between Evelyn and Dent. He tried once when they were alone to get an explanation out of Dent, but the invalid was uncommunicative and even peevish. "You must hate being tied here by the leg," Meredith said, sitting on the edge of Dent's bed to light him a cigarette. "It is excessively trying for us both to be Evelyn's guests, considering the terms on which we parted from him." Dent took his cigarette with a grunt of ungracious thanks. "Excessively" was a word that he had never used in his life. "I feel the strain as acutely as you do, but for the moment I can see no alternative. But you may rely on me to get you out of Évol at the first possible moment."

"No hurry," said Dent stolidly.

"I appreciate the courage with which you face an awkward situation."

"Don't feel it awkward."

"I should have thought—"

"Well, you'd have thought wrong. You generally do."

Conversation was becoming difficult, and Meredith was not sorry to be called down by Evelyn and despatched into the ravine under orders "to shoot some

supper." Left alone, Dent lay back on his pillow with a frown for Meredith and a ruminant smile for Evelyn. He was glad to have "sorted" Meredith. He had instantly discerned and resented Meredith's attempt to draw him out. He was not going to discuss Evelyn with Meredith. An inquisitive fellow, Meredith! Dent was too little self-centred to realise that after a *volte-face* so unaccountable as his own Meredith or any man might well feel curious.

To Dent it all seemed so simple and so natural: directly his first anger had begun to cool, the old affection for his feudal overlord had revived in him strangely mingled with the affection of a good elder brother in the Sixth for his junior and fag. After all, what had Evelyn done? Gone off with another woman and then lied about it! Dent hated the lie, but vaguely supposed it belonged to the Evelyn tradition; an Evelyn would dishonour himself to protect a woman, as coolly as he would cheat a tradesman to pay a gambling debt. Remembering the punishment that Evelyn had undergone and the truly Christian revenge that he had taken for it, Dent was inclined to write "Discharged in full" at the foot of that bill—the more readily because there would keep coming back a creeping doubt, had it been circumstances that lied, and not Evelyn after all? It was difficult in cold blood to associate Evelyn with dishonour.

Of course, if Evelyn were innocent, Meredith would have said that Dent ought to feel ten times more uncomfortable at Évol. But Meredith never saw anything straight! Dent with his shrewd smile reflected that this was not the first time Evelyn had felt the

weight of his friend's right arm. There was that June afternoon long ago when Evelyn had been discovered in the Manor Farm dairy decorated with whiskers of Manor Farm cream. . . . What a pity to manufacture emotions! It was not as if Meredith had had a hand in it. Luckily he had stood by inactive; and so long as it lay between Dent and Evelyn what did it signify? Not much—and especially in view of Evelyn's revenge!

"Meredith," Leslie Wright had once said, "is one of those fellows that always prefer penny coloured to tuppence plain." Incapable of simplicity, he could not follow the workings of Dent's mind, not at all—they were a dark riddle to him; but the result was clear though not the process. He stood alone at Évol. Evelyn was in command, Sophy was his ally, and Dent in some incomprehensible way had subsided into a benevolent neutral. It was the old story, and a dim distress, the wistfulness of a dog that has been hurt and does not know why, mingled in Meredith's anger as he asked himself why he always stood alone. Why had he no friends who would stand up for him right or wrong as these two would stand up for Evelyn, the ungrateful, the undeserving? Then remembering Kitty's constancy—"I shall always love Eve best"—he set his teeth and swore that here at all events Evelyn should not supplant him. Possibly—it was an unwelcome idea which only very stern pressure could have forced on him—it was his own fault if he lacked friends. His temper was fastidious and reserved. But not for Kitty—no, not for Kitty: if it is love that begets love, he would surely be able to oust that unresponsive image of Evelyn from Kitty's

warm and tender heart? For he loved her, and not selfishly; it was her happiness that he was seeking as much as his own. She should not waste her sweetnes and beauty on Evelyn's want of manhood. Surely he could detach her from Evelyn? With a rush of the old unscrupulous audacity, Meredith reflected that the simplest if not the most delicate method was to begin by detaching Sophy from Evelyn. Well, that ought not to be difficult, seeing that in days gone by. . . .

It was sunset, and the sixth night after the storm. Having been with Dent most of the day—he was an insubordinate invalid and had to be watched to keep him from moving about—Sophy had come forth for a breath of air, and to stretch her limbs, cramped from sitting on a wooden chair. She had thrown herself on the turf a little way from the house and was watching the sun's descent into the western head of the ravine. It was one of those mild and cloudy French evenings that recall England, the England of springtime; under a rippled sky, grey nearly all over, but a grey that was perpetually on the verge of parting over the blueness of air or the gilding of low sunshine, the valleys took on a fresher greenness and the hills were dimmed by a misty bloom. Far off in some lonely upland a cuckoo was calling and flying from crag to crag, and his voice, always a little melancholy in an English ear—

The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I—  
was in tune with these half-tones and low lights, these  
grey stones that reflected the colouring of the motion-

less clouds, and these brooks tenderly watering their solitary and sweet-scented dales, where forget-me-not and gentian and frail narcissus blew side by side in fine, thymy grass.

Only in the east, in the direction of the Mediterranean, between quilting cloud and invisible seaboard, there shone as there had shone all day a wide gleam—a girdle of sunlit air, primrose at dawn, azure at noon, and now green and faint, to remind the mountain-dwellers of amber sails on a wine-dark sea. Sophy's sun-loving eyes dwelt on it, turning away from the grey peaks and shady glens. She was still wearing Evelyn's flannels, and they hung loose on her, as the clothes of even a slight man will on a woman, quaintly travestyng the straight shape of a boy; his coat came down halfway to her knee, and under it she wore a sash made out of a couple of red silk handkerchiefs and loosely knotted round her waist. But she had coiled up her hair and put on her shoes and stockings. She sat on a flat bit of sward, her shoulders propped against the cosiest<sup>1</sup> of natural cushions, a good-sized broom bush, which, at once dense and compact and soft, springy and yielding, did as well as the most luxurious armchair ever turned out by Waring and Gillow. Her hands were folded on her lap, her legs stretched out at full length and crossed at the ankle.

Steps on the Ria road: steps she had known very well in days gone by. Sophy frowned, drawing down her straight, rather thick eyebrows till they had the

<sup>1</sup> In my opinion. But I know little about heather, of which many speak highly. It should be noted however that to get the best out of a broom bush one must sprawl plump in the middle of it. Sophy was a townbird.

effect of darkening her eyes. Yes, there was Meredith, carrying Evelyn's gun in one hand and a bird of unknown plumage in the other. He waved to Sophy and vanished into the house. In a minute or so he came out again, bare-headed and relieved of his burdens, and by a gesture asked Sophy's leave to join her on the turf. Sophy gave it with a negligent nod, and Meredith came striding up to her and cast himself prone at her side, leaning his cheek on his hand. Sophy continued to stare at him with her little hard frown as if he puzzled her. What really did puzzle her was her own feeling for him.

She had been so desperately in love with him once! without regret or shame she remembered those hours in Tennant's studio when she had felt there was nothing, nothing he could ask that she would not give . . . with the sweet and reckless prodigality of a woman who will burn her own house down to light a man's candle, for Sophy had no sense of proportion and she was very, very young. Innocent too—more innocent in thought than many women of spotless life: she had given her maidenhood to Meredith to please him not herself, and though she loved him with all her heart, and though to charm him she learnt every wile, yet the moments that were sweetest both in their passing and in her memory were innocent. And what was left of it all now? A handful of cold ashes? Not quite cold. Gone, infinitely remote were those days when all her life was either meeting him or hurrying to meet him: if possible remoter yet the days of her anguish when she discovered how little a model's love meant to him: all that passion and tenderness and grief and torturing humiliation might have happened to another

woman, so deeply had other events and feelings silted up over her not far distant girlhood: and yet for old sakes' sake Meredith was not and could never be to her quite the same as other men.

Sophy kept a diary (in French, and under lock and key). There were names in it, names of men, that she had entirely forgotten. She could not recollect what they were like or when or how she had met or parted from them. There was a cloud over certain years of her girlhood in Paris, the years when Meredith had left her to struggle against the pressure of life without the defense of self-respect. But over the year of her love-affair with Meredith there was no cloud; each tiny incident stood out clear, jokes, way-side meals, a compliment that he had paid her, a walk they had taken together in the Forest of Fontainebleau in autumn, the shoes she had worn (green shoes: Meredith had liked them), the colouring of the elms (it was October, and on one particular tree he had admired one particular gold bough), the purple velvet petals and gilt stamens of dahlias in an inn garden, Meredith's insistence on cutting off the tops of her eggs for her instead of letting her pat them all over with a spoon as she liked to do. . . . No, he could never again be to her no more than other men. Now and again his eyes appraised her as if she were for him not quite like other women.

"Where's Evelyn?"

"Gone to the métairie to fetch some more milk."

"Is Dent asleep?"

"Yes. His temperature's down to ninety-nine point two to-night, which means he'll be pretty well normal to-morrow morning. He's much better. Did

you come up past the landslide?" Meredith nodded.

"They're doing famously: people on foot or riding can get by now, and in another twenty-four hours there'll be a track available for mule-carts. Then we can send for a conveyance from Ria and ship him down to the railway. Candidly, I shall not be sorry to clear out of Évol."

"Why don't you go on alone?" Sophy was malicious enough to ask. "Charles and I could see after Mr. Dent without you." Meredith's smile was rather difficult and strained.

"Sophy, you are a woman, and a clever one. You do not need me to explain to you, in words of one syllable, that I can't steal a march on Evelyn by going back to Perpignan while he is detained here by Dent. That is one of the things that aren't done. Perhaps I am over-scrupulous, for it seems he wouldn't go if he could, still one prefers to be on the safe side. But as soon as the Ria road is clear that moral veto will be withdrawn, and then . . . Sophy, I want to talk to you. You understand Evelyn pretty well, don't you?"

"Ought to, oughtn't I? if—!"

Meredith shrugged his shoulders. "Your relations with him, my dear, are a riddle I do not pretend to have solved. But this much is plain, you are here with him and he did try to conceal your presence from us. You know everything that passed that night we arrived?"

"Yes. You can hear pretty clearly through to the room overhead."

"It was an odious scene," said Meredith. His strong fingers had pulled up a tuft of grass and were tearing

it to bits as if the memory worked on his nerves. "Odious. I'd give a thousand pounds for it never to have happened."

"Would you really?" Sophy murmured. "A thousand pounds? That's a good round sum; and you never did much like parting, did you?"

"You have a natural gift of irony, Sophy, but don't exercise it on me. Perhaps I don't deserve anything better from you, but you should be generous, for I'm at your mercy. You must know that, since you know how matters stand between Evelyn and me."

"Don't you wish you were French, or that it was a hundred years ago?"

"Why?"

"So as you and Charles could have a shot at each other and Mrs. Evelyn could belong to the winner."

"Not in the least. I neither wish to shoot Evelyn nor to let him shoot me," said Meredith drily. "You are a very woman! Why? Because all women love to set a couple of men at each other's throats. You would like to tarre me on against Evelyn, wouldn't you? but you won't do it. Evelyn is my friend. Circumstances have made us hostile but I'm still too fond of him to wish him any harm."

"Is that so? . . . Don't beat about the bush, Edmund. I know you well enough to see when you're only marking time."

"You know me very well, don't you?"

"Better than you'd like," Sophy muttered, not flinching under Meredith's libertine eyes. "D'you flatter yourself you can get one in on me that way? Not you. For all that's come and gone between us I don't care *that*"—she snapped her fingers not too far

from Meredith's nose—"except that it's left me a sort of silly, sneaking fondness for you, I suppose because I gave you such a lot when I was a girl. You didn't treat me well. You'd better not rake up that time in Paris. There's more in it for you to be ashamed of than for me."

"Oh! well, don't let's drag all that up again." He was discomfited and showed it, but only for a moment. "All that Paris life is dead and done with. But after all it was sweet, wasn't it? Do you regret it? I don't. I could never regret anything so delicious as the love and the freshness you gave me. Why should either of us be ashamed? Haven't you the courage to say boldly, as men do, 'This and this were indiscretions, but they were part of my life and I wouldn't lose them out of it, not even now when I've put follies behind me'?"

"Pretty: but I still don't see exactly what you're driving at."

"Alliance offensive and defensive." He raised his bold blue eyes. "Don't you beat about the bush either, my lady. You were in love with me once, but you aren't now. You want Evelyn. That suits my book, because I want his wife."

"How d'you mean—to marry her?"

"Good God yes!"

Sophy laughed—a little ironic laugh without bitterness. "Sorry, I forgot. She's got a good social position, so naturally you would want to marry her. But what's the use of coming to me about it? I don't carry the moon in my pocket, do I? Go along baby! you've wandered up the wrong street."

"You can tell me what I want to know."

"About me and Evelyn? Go on, Edmund—don't be coy."

Meredith sighed. He was not proud of the part he was playing. But for a short cut to Kitty he would have gone through any mire, and fixing his cynical eyes on Sophy he marshalled his arguments before her with the suave brutality which he had inherited from the K. C. his father. "I can't win Mrs. Evelyn unless I can prove that Evelyn has been your lover. He denies it, so now I come to you."

"What, you want me to own up? It's an ill bird—!"

"Come now, Sophy: he isn't the first."

"No, you were that."

"Perhaps. But you see, my dear, he isn't the second either."

"So that I shall be none the worse for owning up?"

"And will you? . . . If you do it, Mrs. Evelyn will divorce her husband and marry me; and if you played your cards well you might easily get Evelyn to marry you."

"Social rehabilitation all round," said Sophy after a moment. Her lip curled. "No wonder you hung in the wind a bit before you brought it out. You *are* a caution, Edmund! It does puzzle me what I ever saw in you to be so fond of." Her voice rose. "You're a gentleman, aren't you? Is this what you call a gentlemanly bargain? Me to give Charles away so as I can get him and you can get his wife? I wonder what Mrs. Evelyn 'd say to it if I gave you away to her instead!"

Meredith was not alarmed; he knew his own power too well. "For old sakes' sake you won't do that. I trust you, Sophy."

*"I trusted you."*

He laid his hand on hers. "Quiet! what's the good of going back over that? I did treat you badly and I've never denied it, you trusted me and I failed you, but I trust you now and you won't fail me: that's the way of the world between men and women, the ha'pence for us and the kicks for you! And after all what is there to give away? There's nothing base in what I propose except the bare look of it. Evelyn's a dog in the manger. He won't let his wife go, but he doesn't want her himself. Heaven knows why he ever married her. They haven't a taste in common. He would be happier if he were a free man; far, far happier if he were married to you.—You do look jolly in those clothes, Sophy," he sat up and slipped his arm round her waist: "for a wild unconventional devil like Eve you would make an ideal wife! He doesn't want to go into society, no more do you. He's always running away from his obligations, and you would run with him. He's an artist to his fingertips and beauty means more to him than it does to most men, and you're beautiful enough, heaven knows! too beautiful for most men's peace of mind. That's why I can't believe his relations with you are so Platonic as he pretends. He's a man like the rest of us, and no man could leave such a fruit on the wall when it was his for the picking: why, I can hardly keep my fingers off it myself when I remember how sweet it was in the old days, though I know it's not for me! But that afternoon in the Forest of Fontainebleau, do you recollect? and the inn at Barbizon—"

"Don't," said Sophy brokenly: "'tisn't fair. . . ."

Meredith let her go and relapsed on the turf. "It

isn't. You're right, I am a blackguard." Lined and drawn by passion, he leant his head down on his folded arms. "But I want her—I want her."

"Poor old boy!" Sophy murmured, caressing his hair. Tears were in her eyes.

So, in the forest of Fontainebleau, under the October oakleaves, he had laid his head in her lap and said "I want you—I want you," and her answer had been given in the inn at Barbizon. He had been sincere then, at twenty-five: unmoved by her distress, heedless of her future, a selfish egoist, yet honest in his need of her. He was sincere now, though there might be a vein of calculation, Sophy fancied, in his candour: his suffering was real, though perhaps he hoped to touch her by it. And she was touched, for the passion that had devastated her girlhood and spoilt her life had left a faint maternal warmth behind it, a disposition to give her baby the moon if he cried for it. But, alas! she could not reach it. Sophy was incontinently truthful. For Meredith, she could have pulled off without a sigh her hardwon mantle of respectability, but not for him nor for Evelyn nor for her own happiness could she say the thing that was not.

"I can't help you, Edmund. I can't say he was my lover when he wasn't, can I?"

"Not your lover?"

"Oh no! never. I loved him, but he never, never wanted me."

"Make him so."

"Make love to him, d'you mean? He wouldn't . . . He's not like you."

"Damn him! I know he isn't." Meredith mut-

tered, hiding his face in his hands. He was half maddened by the shock of disappointment. "He's only half a man. But you could get round him: never tell me! There are ways."

"But I'm not that sort," Sophy pleaded, her voice full of pain. "I don't make up to men that don't want me—and another woman's husband at that! I like Mrs. Evelyn. I used to see her in Chelsea. She's got an awfully nice face, and she was very fond of Charles."

"She's had enough of him now."

"That's not true." Sophy paused, her voice changing. "If it were—"

"I tell you she's sick to death of him!" Meredith said savagely. "Any woman would be that had a grain of self-respect in her. If it's for her you're sorry, your scruples are misplaced. I shall make her happy, which is more than Evelyn ever did or will."

"D'y mean she likes you best?"

"My good girl, that's not the sort of thing one cares to proclaim from the housetops! . . . Oh well, if you must have it, I believe I have her photograph somewhere on me." He began to rummage through his pockets. "Where the deuce—?"

"Breast pocket," suggested Sophy with ten thousand devils in her smile.

"Breast pocket it is." Reddening to his forehead, yet brazen under his confusion, he dragged it out and flung it on the turf: the same photograph that Dent had taken away from Evelyn, and which Meredith had found lying about in Dent's study and had appropriated without leave. Reckless now, Meredith was not going to explain how he had come by it. The end

justifies the means; Sophy was irrationally and unfairly sceptical, and here was one of those lies which are truer than the truth—as Meredith saw it. Sophy examined the portrait long and thoughtfully. A trifle dimmed by hard wear, Kitty's speaking eyes still looked up with the old sweet and gay bravery from under the brim of her shady hat. Sophy shook her head over it with a faint sigh.

"I've seen this photo before, it's the same as the one she gave to Charles when they were engaged. That was the night it all began. . . . So now she gives it to you, does she? She does look nice all the same. Are you so sure you'll make her happy?"

"Turn it over."

"Hallo!" Obeying him, she had come on the inscription: "With Kitty's love." "My goodness! does she chuck her love about like that? Well, perhaps you will make her happy if she's that sort."

"Give it me back," said Meredith. He did not intend to correct Sophy's false impression, and yet against his will he felt sick and ashamed. He tried to take the photograph from her, but she held it fast. Her perplexed and half-displeased eyes had travelled suddenly beyond him and were fixed in a fascinated stare. Meredith, looking round, gave a violent start. Who was this who was coming towards them like a ghost in the twilight, white-clad, and barefoot on the soundless turf? It was Evelyn, carrying the water-bucket on his way to the spring.

Flight and concealment were alike impossible, for he was already close. He stood still, smiling down at Sophy and stretching out one hand for Kitty's portrait. "Mine, I think."

" 'Tisn't, it's hers, she gave it him," said Sophy, relinquishing it not to Evelyn but to Meredith.

"Did she?" said Evelyn. He took it from Meredith and slipped it into the breast of his shirt.

"Don't let him take it, Edmund!" Sophy cried out, more jealous for the man who seemed to need protection than for the man she loved: "why d'you let him?"

Meredith smiled weakly and said nothing. In every struggle, between individuals as between nations, there comes a moment when the balance shifts finally this way or that. In the struggle between himself and Evelyn, Meredith had always innocently assumed that he would win by virtue of that moral domination previously mentioned of character and will. But he was not winning now. Under Evelyn's gentle and amused glance his pretensions shrivelled off him and he felt as though he were left naked. His last garment had fluttered away when Sophy unwittingly betrayed his lie to Evelyn and when Evelyn disdained to expose it.

"That bird you've brought in, Meredith," said Evelyn, shifting his bucket from one hand to the other and gazing down with the unshadowed and firm eyes of a captain who issues orders to his crew, "wants plucking and drawing. I've told you before that that's part of your job. It's quite easy to disembowel him, but getting the feathers off is a slow process and I haven't time for it. You go in and do it or you won't have anything but porridge for breakfast. Sophy, George has woken up and threatens to get out of bed and come down to supper. You might help Meredith with his bird. It would be something for George to amuse himself with if you took it into his room." He departed, swinging the bucket.

"D'you mean to tell me," breathed Sophy, round-eyed, "she never did give you that photo after all?"

Meredith got up flicking a blade of grass from his cuff. "I forgot that infernal bird. Come along, Sophy, we've received our marching orders."

## CHAPTER XXI

**A**ND that night there came to Evelyn his renaissance.

He had not foreseen it: a dreamer, a laborious artist, absorbed in his work, he had not felt the change that was working in him, and when it forced itself on his consciousness he was taken by surprise. He had gone about all the evening in high elation, for he had enjoyed every moment of his little duel with Meredith, and it was sweet as honey in its after-taste; but he did not know that he had enjoyed it because for the first time in his life he had bullied another man into obeying his orders. He had whistled as he laid the supper, but with no more comprehension of his own instincts than a robin in May. Dent was cheerful as usual, Meredith silent and stiff, while Sophy, all eyes and ears, watched Evelyn timidly as though nervous of him; and Evelyn was amiably polite to all three of them, and ministered to their carnal needs with fried trout and an omelette *aux fines herbes* and white wine of Ronciaulx and purple lowland figs at fifteen centimes a dozen with the red pulp bursting out of the seams of their jackets—he enjoyed pressing those figs on Meredith, who was a *gourmet* and known to be fond of them. But it was not till after supper, when the house was quiet but for the murmur of falling water which haunted it day and night, that he began to analyse his own sensations.

Evelyn was always first to rise and last to retire.

Now that he was no longer alone, he had taken to locking up at night. But before doing so, as soon as the others were safe in bed, he went up to his bathing pool. The stream, shrunk to its old dimensions, was lipping placidly on its stone brim under a dark fringe of maidenhair; the moon, now full, was hanging over the valley like a cup of pearl, out of which a pallor of light rained down evenly over opal cloudland and frozen peak and flowery turf and the dark leaf and stem of his sentinel ash tree. He stripped and stood for some moments indolently bathing in that grey glow, which was so tranquil that not a twig stirred overhead nor one seeding grass-stalk moved at his side. All above him the cistus bushes and the hollies and the more loosely sprinkled foliage of birch and alder painted blots of shadow, black as jet, on slants of whitened turf. The surface of his pool was glassy quiet, and like a glass it reflected the moonlight, and the leaning ash tree, and a frieze of knotgrass, and even a tiny pattern of maidenhair fronds along its granite lip. The reflection of the moonlight was so brilliant that it almost dazzled him. This was the Southern moonlight that is as bright as day. And slowly, languidly, thrilling as the chill water crept up from instep to knee and from knee to thigh, Evelyn waded into his bath and stooped down in it till the wave was over his head and all the world was for him a narrow moonshot pool, a rippling gloom veined and glossed with silver, drenching his hair, fingering his eyelids, taking his breath, feeling him all over like the fluid arms of some Ovidian nymph.

Then with hair still dark and wet Evelyn returned to the inn, threw down a rug on the parlour floor, fetched

a sheet and a pillow, and went to bed in his usual way. But he could not sleep. It was hot in the house. He would rather have lain down out of doors, but dared not, in case Dent should want anything in the night. He lay quiet in a ray of the moon, his eyes wide open, the events of the last seven days flitting before him like the painted sequence of a dream; Dent going down between hot cistus bushes into Ria: Sophy, moth-white in the dusky parlour: Meredith meekly handing over Kitty's portrait—and at that point Evelyn began to laugh, burying his head in his arms not to be overheard: had ever the tables been more neatly turned? They were his guests. How Meredith must be chafing! But for bare decency he could not go to Perpignan while Evelyn was tied to Évol. He was Evelyn's guest and had to do as he was bid—even to the extent of handing over Kitty's portrait!

Dent too! Evelyn's shoulders were still sore from his encounter with Dent, but after saving Dent's life he could afford to remember it without bitterness. Even apart from that most Christian and consolatory vengeance, he felt fairly satisfied with his own behaviour. He had not winced under punishment; he had borne it as well as it could be borne, after the rules laid down for his order. It was not his fault if Dent was too strong for him. Poor George! he had suffered worse than Evelyn, for his righteous indignation had burnt out into grey ashes of discomfort and remorse, whereas Evelyn had nothing to be ashamed of.

And so he lay still thinking fast in the moving moonlight: at first incoherently, scene after scene shaping itself before his mind's eye without his own will, but

afterwards in terms of greater precision, when he came to analyse not thoughts only but sensations too. As the heat of the house began to supersede the fresh chill of his bath, he became aware of his own body, drawn like a violin-string taut from head to foot with potential energy, and tuned—to what? To the measure of a dance that kept time and tune with the dancing rhythm of the universe. Every man to his trade: the athlete in such hours, Greek, Roman, or English, sees himself hurling a discus, or bending a bow, or kicking a goal: Evelyn phrased the sense of power in terms of music. He was an instrument on which immortal airs could be played: no—he was both instrument and agent, the violin and the hand that held it. And still the tension was drawn ever keener and keener till a cry trembled on his lips. . . . But what on earth was there to set a man's blood on fire in the grave, dark inn of Évol standing solitary under that rain of moonlight? He glanced at the watch on his wrist. It was after midnight. No doubt the others had gone to sleep long ago; and why not Evelyn?—As well bid the first violin sleep while the orchestra sways to the rhythm of his bow! Evelyn was violin and orchestra too.

He lay quiet: clasped his arms behind his head and forced himself to lie perfectly quiet, staring up at the whitewashed ceiling blackened by charcoal smoke and striped by heavy rafters. His moonray had shifted round and was falling slant across his throat and shoulders, leaving his eyes in gloom. An immense moth had strayed in and was fluttering about now high, now low, its faint shadow following it. And still those waves of sensation, too sweet for pain, too

restless for pleasure, came thrilling over his limbs: waves of power, of energy, of vital force, like an incoming tide that slowly washed up over him from his feet to his head. In his nervous, strained boyhood he had never felt anything like them, unless it were on those nights of glamour when he had slipped out of Temple Evelyn to lie on the grass of the Roman Road.

But on the Roman Road he had been happy because he was alone: and so too at Évol, under those fields of blue air where the hawk and the vulture wheeled and fell, or the moon rained down her clear light. Now however he was no longer alone, and yet he was happy.

Yes, and happier than ever, and stronger, and more fully alive: and what was so strange was that the intruders overhead went far to make him so! Dent in bed in borrowed pyjamas, Meredith gloomily trussing his fowl, he had the whip hand of both of them—he was captain and they were crew. So far as other men were concerned, Evelyn felt that he was at last getting into right relations with the world: a man's large freedom of give and take, sure of his own footing and therefore indifferent to the pressure of other lives.

And then there was *Clair de Lune* boxed up in the biscuit tin! Never before had Evelyn laid his work by when he was in the thick of it without a miserable ache of fear. Suppose one's imagination ran dry? The mood of every artist in his fits of despondence—"I shall never paint another stroke," "I shall never write another line,"—had been Evelyn's normal frame of mind. Joyous hours of inspiration had come as a caprice of good luck, on butterfly wings. Never had he felt sure of himself beyond the morrow. Delays

and hindrances had been magnified from a trifling vexation into torture by this secret nervous dread. It was an absurd fear to be cherished by a man like Evelyn, a musician born and bred, who had been found at two years of age squatting on a fender stool absorbed in the tune played by the nursery kettle, and gravely trying in his infant treble to fit it with an obligato: but it was a real fear all the same, and a dangerous, for, in the inevitable interaction of nerve and brain, it had often produced the paralysis it threatened. Now however, taking account with his own soul, Evelyn swore that he would finish *Clair de Lune* if he lived, to-morrow if not to-day, next year if not this year!—he had in time the courage for it, and the craftsmanship, and the judgment, and above all the great creative vision that feeds the springs of art.

And when it was done he would go on to better work, to work more solid and strong and lasting: to the *Passion* of which he had talked to Sophy, or an *Arab Symphony* whose spacious barbaric curves had long run in his head, or perhaps the *Requiem, 1914* over which his undermind had brooded even while H. E. and rifle-fire were deafening him with their infernal duet: never mind whether he could get it produced or no or whether critics and compeers praised or blamed, done it should be from the only motive that ought to count with an artist—because power and vision and will are fused in one force which drives to its outlet in creation. . . .

But what on earth was to be done with Kitty?

Kitty, his wife, who was prepared to give herself to Meredith! Evelyn drew a long sigh and turned over, clenching his hands till their knuckles whitened

in the moonlight. "Hang it, she's my wife," he reflected with a laugh under his breath. "She has been my wife. . . ." And suddenly he found himself recalling certain moments of their married life in a brooding heat of memory which beggared sensation. Out of those hours of dalliance he had always emerged unhappy, restless, and profoundly ashamed, but he felt no shame now and no conflict, for in this fresh strength that had come on him all dissensions were reconciled: and latent far down in him he felt the forces of life moving towards their end, which was to beget life: blind and slow forces, but inexorable, and no more willing to satisfy themselves through purely intellectual pleasures, than is a tree in April to put forth flowers and no leaves. They moved towards wife and child: and they were irresistible because the force of all the world went with them.

But they were blind forces. In regard to Meredith, and Dent, and *Clair de Lune*, Evelyn knew where he stood and what he was doing: but he was far from having mastered these old, dim, latent, and universal instincts, which carried him along like a leaf on the rhythm of the world. In his married life he had never known his way, nor did he know it now.

His view of his duty to his wife was purely external. He never had thought it out for himself. In the Hunting Tower he had found out that she loved him. A secondhand code of chivalry indicated marriage, and he married her: only to tangle himself in a network of delicate evasions and hypocrisies, because he did not like being married to her. As soon as she gave him an excuse he ran away from her. His precipitate blind flight to Évol had at least the merit of its

spontaneity! It was perhaps the one perfectly sincere thing Evelyn had done in all his dealings with Kitty. But he had not been able to keep on the same level; when he found that Meredith desired Kitty he had relapsed into the conventional attitude. No man can be called by a more odious name than that of the complaisant husband, and it should never be applied to him. Beyond that point he had not gone. He had never asked himself whether he deserved to hold Kitty, or whether in the end an irregular readjustment might not be, for them all, the best way out. No man should call him a complaisant husband! And so he had defied and mated Meredith and had taken Kitty's portrait from him—and by the by what had he done with that portrait?

He had slipped it into the breast of his shirt, partly because that seemed to be the proper thing to do and partly because he had no jacket on and it was too large to go into the pockets of his flannel trousers. When he came back with his bucket of water and turned in to light his Primus and boil a kettle for supper, it had got in his way and the sharp edges of cardboard had pricked him, and he had taken it out and put it—now where had he put it? Evelyn's happy smile became sheepish and sickly when it dawned on him that he had left his wife's portrait inside the tin of Quaker Oats! By the code of eternal Aphrodite, it had better have been left inside Meredith's waist-coat.

And yet—no, for it was Kitty's portrait, and Kitty was his wife: he had never loved her, and apparently she had ended by not loving him, but no other man had ever known her as he knew her: touch her who

dare! "She has slept in my arms," he said under his breath, and frowning he turned over again to face the moonlight. The house was deathly quiet. Indoors he could hear no sound but the ticking of his watch, and the louder whirr of Monsieur Blanc's brass-weighted pendulum, and a dry rustle of moth-wings among rafters, and the beating of his own heart, loudest of all. "And, by heaven, she shall be my wife again."

. . . and then there was Sophy: once Meredith's sweetheart by her own confession, since then the light o' love of many men, now, if he cared to take her, his own. How loud the beating of his heart sounded in the midnight quiet! He touched it and found it throbbing like a hammer. How strange! He debated this phenomenon as well as he could for the cobwebs that still clouded his brain, and supposed that he was at last beginning to feel as other men felt towards these women who gave so much and asked so little. He had heard the taunt, if it was a taunt, that Sophy had flung at Meredith—"If it was you I should have been yours, shouldn't I?" This then was where he fell short of other men. Moving blindfold, Evelyn travelled by Heaven knows what bypaths of instinct diverted by tradition, when he should have followed his instincts alone; they had led him right for Meredith and for *Clair de Lune*, but for Sophy as for his wife they failed him—or he deserted them. For here it was harder to find his way—so many thousands of other men had trodden the wrong road before him.

And still the wild surge of life continued to stream through him in ever-mounting strength, and still undisciplined. The low parlour lit by one moon-ray had

grown too dark and hot for him, and the flutter, flutter of the moth irritated him. Evelyn flung off his sheet and stood up. The moth had settled on the ledge of the piano and sat there slowly folding its drowsy wings: a happy night-wanderer, the freaked wings thick in bloom. As soon as he tried to seize it and put it through the window, it rose again and fluttered a few inches away, out of his reach. Its aimless activity and silly fear provoked Evelyn. He took a swift step forward and caught and crushed it in his hand. He had never done such a thing before in his life. He opened his palm and looked down at the small wreck of plumage. Dead! no more flutterings: the rich wings were a mere smudge on his fingers. He shook it off and opened the parlour door.

All the house was hushed now but for the murmur of brooks and runnels that encompassed it. Barefoot, he went to the foot of the staircase. The door of Dent's room was shut; it had been agreed that he no longer needed Sophy's ministrations. Treading softly, Evelyn listened at the keyhole. He could distinguish Dent's regular breathing, but no sound from Meredith. Evelyn shrugged his shoulders: if Meredith were awake what would it signify? He did not realise that in his excitement he was more reckless than Meredith would have been in his place, just as Meredith, though he did not care for animals or pity them, would scarcely have crushed the moth in his bare hand. Evelyn tried the opposite door. It was not locked. He opened it noiselessly and went in without knocking.

The room, his own room, was bathed in moonlight and on his bed under the open window Sophy lay asleep. She had pulled the sheet half over her head

and nothing much of her was visible except two long brown plaits thrown back on her pillow and her thick brown eyebrows and the tip of her nose. Alone in the house with three men one of whom she loved while another had been her lover, she slept as placidly as an infant. Evelyn shut the door behind him without a sound and stood watching her. What had he come to find? Not this tranquillity of innocence. Her life had written no mark on her, so far: even her lips, which quickly betray the sensual nature by their droop of fatigue, were as firmly and as delicately set as the lips of his wife. There was nothing of the moth in Sophy. A tinge of sadness darkened that strong little face, but not a tinge of fear.

Evelyn stood watching her so long that the moonlight perceptibly shifted its pale quadrangle on the floor. Shadow invaded Sophy's silken head. She slept sound, tired after her broken nights. The roar of the torrent in the valley-bottom came in through the open window like the washing of waves of moonlight made vocal, blown by the wind.

A chime struck in the parlour: Un—deux—trois—quatre, and then on a deeper tone, Un : Deux. It was two o'clock in the morning. Before long the moon would be down in the western valley, and the roses of dawn would begin to blossom out of blue air. Evelyn raised his head with a start and looked round him as if he scarcely knew what he was doing, or had dreamed of doing. But he was in Sophy's room and Sophy was at his mercy. She loved him now as she had loved Meredith at Fontainebleau, and would love other men, perhaps, in the future: poor Sophy, destined to adventures! He had come to prove his manhood. . . .

Sophy stirred and turned on her pillow, giving a little sigh like a tired dog. "I love you for being good"—Evelyn had not forgotten that cry, which had put him to shame even when he deserved it, and if he ceased to deserve it what sort of memory would it come to be? It was the cry of an essentially innocent heart. . . . Evelyn drew back with a reflective smile. Not by trampling down a flower that had just begun to lift up its head would he prove his manhood.

Noiseless he had entered Sophy's room, noiseless he left it; but in a sleeping house those who cannot sleep feel the vibration of movement even when it makes no sound, and as he closed Sophy's door Meredith came out of Dent's room. They met face to face on the narrow landing. It was not dawn yet and there was no light but a glimmer from Meredith's north window. He stood still blocking the way to the stairs with his broad shoulders and handsome, coldly amused face.

"I have my evidence now and I shall use it, Evelyn. I shall not scruple to let your wife and Dent know that I found you coming out of Sophy's room."

"Hush," said Evelyn under his breath, "she was very tired—she is asleep."

"What's the matter?" Dent called through the open doorway. He had heard their voices and had raised himself on his pillow to follow Meredith's movements with the anxious strained eyes of the sick man unused to helplessness. "Is anything wrong?"

"Now, how careless you are, Meredith!" said Evelyn reproachfully. He brushed past Meredith and went up to Dent. "Nothing at all, old fellow. Meredith heard me moving about and came out to see if

he could make himself useful, but he couldn't. You lie still or you'll send your temperature up again, and the more you do that the longer it'll be before we can ship you back to Perpignan." He smiled at Meredith, who found some difficulty in containing his anger. But Evelyn had the whip hand of him—there was Dent's temperature to be considered! "And you must be dying to get back to Perpignan," Evelyn continued, smiling into Dent's eyes, "think of Kitty left there all alone! So now you go to sleep."

"What's the matter with you?" Dent asked, contentedly leaning his head on Evelyn's arm while Evelyn turned his hot pillow and patted it into shape: "you look as wide awake as though it were the middle of the day instead of the middle of the night!"

"All Meredith's fault, it was him you heard not me. Get back to bed, Edmund, and if you hear any more noises don't prowl round: this is my house not yours and I always sleep with one ear open: you go to the Land of Nod and stay there." He gave Meredith a little push with the tips of his fingers towards the opposite alcove.

Meredith was white with passion. Evelyn in the imperative mood was an Evelyn whom he would have liked to shoot! But one cannot shoot one's host or even throw him downstairs, and he had to stand by inactive while the delinquent, still broadly smiling, walked out of the room. Whither? Not back to his own hard bed on the parlour floor.

Dent was asleep again in five minutes, but for Meredith no more sleep was to be had that night. Throughout the chill still hours before dawn he lay listening to noises downstairs, small hushed sounds, such a

stir of movement as a brownie might make over his nocturnal tasks: once or twice the kitchen door opened and he heard steps in the yard: he racked his brains to guess what Evelyn was doing, but in vain. There was at all events no footfall on the landing, no fresh opening of Sophy's door.

After the sun was up all noises ceased, and then Meredith fell asleep. He woke late—or rather was awakened by a knocking. The room was flooded with misty blue daylight, the north window framed a square of sky "dark with excess of light" and a grey peak sungilt over a garland of haze. Meredith sprang out of bed, glanced at Dent who was yawning and rubbing his eyes, and called out "Come in," expecting Evelyn with Dent's breakfast. But no one came in.

"It's me—Sophy. Are you up?"

"Yes, but not dressed. I overslept. I'll be down in ten minutes. Is Evelyn there?"

"I can't find him anywhere!"

"What!" said Meredith, flinging open the door.

"There's water in the bucket, and faggots piled by the fireplace, and the eggs and all put ready for me to cook breakfast, but I can't find Eve, and the parlour door's unlocked. He seems to have gone."

"Gone where?"

"How on earth should I know?" Sophy resentfully demanded. "I'm not his nursemaid, am I? You always expect me to know everything!"

"You saw him last."

"I didn't! You came up after I did. You were out smoking on the terrasse till nearly eleven o'clock, for I heard you come up, and jolly cross I felt, with

poor Mr. Dent not able to go to sleep till you were in bed! *I never went downstairs again after supper.*"

"Sophy," said Meredith, dropping his hands on her shoulders, "you saw him last?"

"I didn't, Edmund!" She raised her hazel eyes, wells of truth, clear and dauntless, not a shade of any feeling in them but bewilderment and irritation, and, as his grip tightened, a twinge of actual pain. "The last thing I said to him was goodnight from the top of the stairs, and you hadn't come up then. Besides if I had it doesn't follow he'd have told me where he was going to, does it? I'm not his wife!—What *are* you doing?" Involuntarily Meredith had clenched his strong hands on her as if he would have wrung the truth out of her by force. But when had Sophy told him a lie? She was transparently honest and he knew it and could have struck her for it.

"Don't, Edmund! You hurt!"

"Drop it Meredith. It isn't Miss Sophy's fault if Eve's stolen a march on us."

Meredith released Sophy and turned round. Dent was sitting up in bed, propped on one arm. His good-humoured red-brown face was quite grave but his eyes were dancing. "What's the odds he's gone off to Perpignan?" he said, innocently turning them from Meredith to Sophy and back to Meredith again. "He's such a considerate chap is Eve, and he knows Kitty will be worrying. Yes, that's it, I'd lay any odds; I thought something was up from his manner when he came in here last night. Yes, he did say he was too busy to go, didn't he? but Eve says a lot of things he never means to stick to. I thought he was working

up in that direction, these last few days. And a good job too! I dare say you've heard, Miss Sophy, that he's had a bit of a tiff with my sister. But it'll soon come right when once they're face to face; outsiders never ought to shove their oar in between husband and wife."

## CHAPTER XXII

KITTY was not of an impatient temper, but in those hot summer days after the storm she rapidly came to hate Perpignan as she had never hated any spot before. Not that she was anxious about George: at the outset a long telegram told her precisely what had happened, and every day later she received a bulletin describing the condition of the invalid and the progress of the roadmending gang. He would be with her probably in a fortnight at most. Still a fortnight is a long time to wait in Kitty's state of helpless uncertainty. She would have liked to go to Évol but dared not; if one roof had sheltered her and Evelyn and Meredith, the situation would have become too delicate! She was not even sure who wrote her telegrams, for they were colourless and unsigned, and referred to Dent and Meredith and Evelyn all in the third person, as if the writer were some being from a higher sphere: she suspected Evelyn's hand, because they could not come from Dent, and this odd trick of sending them unsigned was more like Evelyn than Meredith: her own style was equally colourless, and she too put no signature, because she could not sign herself "Kitty" to Meredith, nor "Kitty Evelyn" to Evelyn. They irritated her beyond words.

But on the seventh day, when evening drew on without bringing her any telegram at all, irritating or no, Kitty felt so restless and harassed that she could have wept. It had been hot in Perpignan—

brutally hot. Into the lowland township the sun beat like a fierce enemy come to assault it and take it by storm. Dust drifted inches deep in alley and square, paint blistered on the green sunshutters, and the leaves even of the sycamores flagged and faded. To walk in the streets was to have one's eyes dazzled and one's cheeks scorched by the glow reflected from house walls shining in ivory or honey-colour or the red of desert sand. Most of the population, including Kitty, stayed within doors till six o'clock. Not till the sun began to creep downhill, and the savagery of his gold stare to abate, and the *tramontane* to blow in puffs of balm, did they come out into the air; and even then they only moved slowly from one patch of shadow to another, fanning themselves with little paper fans or sipping iced drinks at café tables, the women putting back their long black veils and the men lighting cigarettes to keep away flies.

Kitty, English from head to heel in her grey chiffon dress and grey slippers, went no further than the flowery patio of her inn. Her little waiter, amiable and absurd with his little snub nose and red moustache turning up at the tips, knew what she wanted and brought it in a twinkling: a plate of biscuits and her own spirit kettle, on which it pleased her to boil water and make her own tea. The process amused Jules, who hovered round her obviously taking notes. He had already confided to her, between courses at table d'hôte, that his ambition was to make the voyage to London, where one sees life and puts by money. Kitty, like many another respectable and conscientious Englishwoman, had smuggled a pound of the best Souchong through the customs. She had not paid

duty on it because she had feared that the Revenue officers might succumb to temptation and impound it. This illegal act sat light on her spirits, and Dent, though he threatened to denounce her, had vastly enjoyed what he called a decent English cup of tea, while Meredith had admired the calm determination with which Mrs. Evelyn, when it did not suit her to conform to French fashions, made herself comfortable in her own way.

She had just put two spoonfuls into the pot when Jules, who had drifted indoors, drifted out again all smiles: "A gentleman to see Madame." Jules was truly sorry for Madame, whose Mayblossom complexion charmed his eyes accustomed to the brunette skins of the South. All the hôtel indeed was sorry for her—it was so *triste* for her to be left alone, since at her age it was impossible for her to go about by herself. Kitty started, almost imperceptibly: the hand that held the teaspoon was checked for one moment . . . only for one moment, while she looked up at Jules with the smile of the woman accustomed to bewitch men, even the Jules of a French inn. It was not one of the Messieurs who had gone to Évol? Alas! no—Jules, desolated at not being able to produce the right person, raised his hands and let them fall again, palms out. It was a Monsieur not very tall, but (hopefully) fair, fair like a Frenchman of the north, and had the eyes gay and the manner lively and agreeable. Would Jules then have the kindness to produce this Monsieur? Jules flew.

And Kitty finished making the tea. She had enough presence of mind to put in an extra spoonful and

fill the pot to the brim. Evelyn always took three cups.

A moment later Jules held up the myriad strings of glass beads that formed a twinkling portière, and Evelyn emerged. Before he reached her Kitty had framed a series of vivid and fresh impressions of him—that he was burnt brown like a gipsy, that he was looking extraordinarily handsome and daredevil, and that for once he was not at all nervous and she would not have to wear out her own slender stock of composure in setting him at ease. Evelyn, was for him, unusually point device. Like his wife he was in light clothes: a linen coat, a white shirt with a turn-down collar, white string-soled shoes of the country, and the prettiest of the ties that he “wore to Ria,” pale green and loosely knotted after the fashion of a French student. His costume in short was a trifle foreign and more than a trifle picturesque, but it suited him, and Kitty, though she knew exactly what Meredith would have thought of it, was incapable of criticism, when he came up to her taking off his hat and smiling with what she allowed herself to call the Devil’s own impudence into her astonished eyes.

“Kitty, how nice it is to see you again, and how charmingly—er—cool you look! Are you going to offer me an English cup of tea?”

“Three,” said Kitty, giving him her hand. “Thank you, Jules.” Jules had returned with a second deck chair, and Evelyn dropped into it and crossed his legs. “How is George?”

“Ever so much better—fit to travel in a day or two. His temperature was practically normal last night.

I do hope you haven't been anxious! You had our wires every day?"

"I did have wires every day: yours, I suppose, weren't they?"

"You recognised the signature?" Evelyn enquired with a wide grin.

"I didn't think Mr. Meredith would have been such a schoolboy."

"What jolly biscuits! May I have all the sugar ones? You never did like them, and I don't get gâteaux at Évol. It's the most God-forsaken spot you ever saw in all your born days: two miles from a house, and that's only what they call a métairie, a farm and out-buildings, and ten from the railway. I live on milk and eggs and sardines and the spoils of the chase. I've been looking forward all day to my dinner to-night."

"Where are you staying?"

"Here—so I hope they feed you well. I want eight courses."

"Have you engaged a room? I thought the hôtel was full," said Kitty, stirring her tea.

"So it is: I've bagged Meredith's," was the cheerful reply, "so that I can use his things. I settled to before I came off. No, I didn't ask Meredith, I simply settled in my own mind. It saved a lot of trouble, because with ten miles to cover you want to march light. I haven't brought anything except a toothbrush." Kitty went on stirring her tea. She felt helpless and weak and incredibly resigned, like a swimmer in the last stages of drowning. "I can't help wondering," Evelyn pursued his easy flow, "how George will get

on without me. Meredith doesn't shine as a house-maid. I've had a tremendous job breaking him in. I never even tried to coach him up in the more domestic duties. What I did feel was that if I made the beds, and did the sweeping and the scrubbing and the dusting, the least he could do was to not only shoot rabbits for us and catch fish but skin 'em and gut 'em as well. Oh, I assure you he's learnt a lot since he's been at Évol! He can truss a hen now in a most scientific manner. But he still doesn't love doing it: he chafes."

"I don't believe it!" said Kitty flatly.

"You wait and see. I had to stand over him at first but now he can be trusted by himself. But he can't cook—Sophy and I had to do that between us."

"Who is Sophy—the bonne?"

"No." Evelyn set down his cup and drew in his legs. "I'm glad you ask, because it shows that Meredith hasn't written to you yet. I didn't think he would, but with Meredith one can't always be sure. Sophy is Sophy Carter, the pretty girl who used to live over us in Chelsea. Do you remember her? you used to say you liked the look of her."

Kitty's wide eyelids drooped. "I remember very well."

"She has been staying with me for a few days. We were alone in the house the first night," Evelyn pursued with easy emphasis. "She was not there when George first came over to look me up, but I found her waiting for me when I got back from seeing him off at Ria. Sophy's standards aren't conventional. She is a very old friend of mine and I'm very fond of her, but her life hasn't been irreproachable, and that

was one reason why I never took you up to see her in Chelsea. The other was that I was too sorry for myself to be sorry for other people. It was bad and ungrateful behaviour, and I owe Sophy an apology for it, for I've since found out that she felt it a good deal. Women in her position are naturally sensitive. But now I want you to know her. She's been trying hard to keep straight, but her loneliness has made it very difficult, because when a woman is as lovely as Sophy there's always a man waiting on her doorstep, and she's tempted to let him in if it were only to scare away ghosts. If you would be kind to her, go and see her now and then and let her come and see us, it would make all the difference. And you will, won't you? I've arranged for you to go back with me to Évol to-morrow—”

“You've done what?” Kitty cried, starting from her chair.

“Be calm,” Evelyn retained his own, “there's nothing to be frightened at! The road is open for traffic to-day, and I hunted up a market cart, one of those jolly little gigs with canvas hoods, to meet the train from Perpignan in the morning. The four-wheelers are the very deuce, but the two-wheelers don't joggle much. Did you think I was going to walk you ten miles uphill on those little velvet paws? Oh no! oh no! The domain when you get there is small, I own, and you won't be too comfortable, but there are four rooms, so we shall shake down somehow, and you won't mind crowded quarters for once, will you? It's topping country and I still have a lot of sardines. We can have it for a picnic; that's a word that covers a multitude of—I was going to say fleas, but there

aren't any now. It took me three months to get rid of them but I did it in the end. Unless Meredith imported any."

"Are you seriously under the impression that I'm coming with you to Évol to-morrow morning?"

"Can't you see George counting the hours? He simply hates your being left to fend for yourself in a French pub. I left a note for him in the Quaker Oats tin. Meredith will find it when he goes to make the porridge. It's the one thing he can do in the cookery line so he jolly well has to do it. Because of course shooting rabbits or netting trout isn't a fair equivalent for washing up dishes and emptying slops, but he is so very unhandy, we had to let him off lightly."

"Are you quite mad?" Kitty asked helplessly.

"I expect Meredith is a lot madder," said Evelyn.

He sat back in his chair sipping his tea and chuckling softly to himself. Kitty's one overpowering sensation was wonder. She felt quite dazed and could have cried with bewilderment and distress. But Evelyn looked up, caught her eye, and smiled at her with such unmixed devilry that she found herself laughing instead. "I'm fed up with Meredith," he explained, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper. "He's a perfect nuisance. No good whatever on a desert island. You know, Kitty, I can quite understand your wanting to run away with some one else after I ran away from you. It would have been a quid pro quo—not to say a Tertium Quid pro quo. But it does defeat me why you should pitch on Meredith. For a journey of adventure one needs a thoroughly reliable umbrella. If you had consulted me I could have recommended you half a dozen better men,

à choix. There's Dimmie now: why not try Dimmie? He's water-tight. I'm afraid you would find Meredith let in a lot of rain."

"Do you want some more tea," said Kitty: "idiot?"

"Two cups please. First one and then the other, not both together. By the by, there's just one question I'm going to ask you, and it's the only one I shall ever ask: did you give Meredith your photograph?"

"I certainly should have if he had asked me for one, but he never did. How many lumps do you take now?"

"Three. Thank you: yes, a lot of rain."

"Why?"

Evelyn shook his head. "Don't be curious; curiosity is a failing of your sex from which you used to be conspicuously free. And talking of women that's a very pretty dress. I've always been so grateful to you for not wearing open dresses in the heat of the sun. Consequently you can afford to do it in the evening. I hate a red V, but your throat is as white as milk." Kitty's hand was trembling as she gave him his cup; she could not control it though she knew he was watching her. "It's a long time since I've seen an English lady except you and Sophy, and Sophy at this moment—I trust you won't be shocked!—is wearing a suit of my own. She came off without any luggage, got wet through the night of the storm, and has been held up ever since. I must say she looks awfully pretty in flannels. I can't take my eyes off her, and I often catch Meredith watching her too. I should never be surprised if Meredith ended by marrying her. It's exactly the sort of thing these cautious, cold-blooded chaps do drift into doing at forty or thereabouts;

and it mightn't turn out badly, for he's a kind-hearted fellow so long as he gets his own way, and Sophy would ask nothing better than to warm his slippers and lick his boots. That reminds me, I had better extricate one of her trunks from Ria and we can take it up in our gig. I hope it won't involve assaulting the chef de gare, for I haven't her bulletin, I came off in such a hurry; but luckily he's a personal friend of mine so I dare say I can square him. If I can't you shall go and smile at him and he will instantly succumb."

"I am not going to Évol with you!"

"Oh, you couldn't disappoint George! If it weren't for that I'd rather have waited another day or two myself, for the road is most awfully rough, but it's quite safe, and he's bored to death, poor old chap. He pines for his *Telegraph*. I hadn't even a pack of Patience cards to keep him quiet. We might get some in the town. And there are one or two other things I should like, to make him more comfortable; only there won't be much room in the cart—but you won't want to bring more than a suitcase, will you? Évol won't run to a dressing room: so you can share my brushes."

"What has happened to you?" said Kitty. She leaned back in her chair and gazed at him from head to foot as if he were strange to her. And so in fact he seemed: the pert Charles Evelyn who sat facing her, his teacup precariously balanced on his knee, was not the exhausted man whose languid courtesy had cut her to the heart in Chelsea, but a new, an original Charles Evelyn, with more than his share of original sin. "What have you done to yourself?

You're so changed I don't know you. I feel all at sea."

"Say in haven."

"In haven?" Kitty repeated stupidly. "What haven? —Oh!" She began to blush. "No, Eve, no—you mustn't think it's only to ask and have. You know why I left you, though I never told George or Edmund. I kept your secret. But you know it was for no light reason."

"My darling, I haven't the faintest idea!"

"Were you so blind? Yes, I see you were." She stood up and moved away, and Evelyn followed her. At one end of the patio there was a mossy tank fringed with ferns, among which a fountain danced ceaselessly like a thin silver nymph in a bath of stone; and round it the lauriers roses with their shiny dark leaves and pink paper flowers had grown into a dense thicket, while overhead the spire of a magnolia sprang up into the blue evening sky, one creamy blossom as large as a waterlily glowing like a point of flame in the slant of an accidental sunray. Here in the protecting shadow of the lauriers roses, her voice, always low, overflowed by the murmur of the fountain, Kitty turned round to Evelyn.

"I left you because, in plain English, you didn't want me—you shrank from me. You liked me and we were friends, but underneath all your kindness and courtesy you were like ice, you couldn't bear me near you. Perhaps I was the wrong woman for you, but I don't think it was that, or not only that. The incapacity was in you, not in me. I think you ought never to have married. Now I've hurt you." Evelyn was very pale.

"I am so sorry, Eve," Kitty murmured. "I didn't want to hurt you. But you hurt me, and now you want to begin all over again. Oh! how you made me suffer! I don't say this to reproach you, because it was no fault of yours; it was mine for ever marrying you, when I knew you didn't love me. But I did—I did suffer, and I couldn't endure to suffer like that again. Oh! that night, that last night in Chelsea," she pressed her hands together with the gesture that comes naturally to one who is either enduring or recalling great pain, "that's not one of the experiences that can be forgotten in a minute, directly you want to whistle me back to heel. You made me feel such shame then; if you had treated me as men treat women they don't respect, I couldn't have felt more abased and rolled in the dust. No, it was nothing overt, nothing done or said! you were always deadly polite: I'd rather have been beaten—"

"Like me."

"Like—?"

"George gave me a beating," Evelyn explained. "We had a fight and I got the worst of it. You're not the only one that's been rolled in the dust. Dearest, why nurse this rankling grudge? I don't. I've entirely forgiven George, and I think he knows better now: he hasn't apologised, but I catch him eyeing me wistfully, as if it worried him to reflect that he hasn't always acted up to the ideal of the feudal retainer."

"Are you serious?"

"O Lord yes! it was the most dramatic incident you ever saw. But that's all past and done with, we're the best of friends again now, and I only mention it to show you that you can't have all the tears to yourself.

I suffered too, like the cook in *Candide*. But why harp on bygone sorrows? They give me no pleasure. It's the future I'm interested in. What should you say to keeping on the inn at Évol? Then when England gets too much for me (not Chelsea—I shall never live in town again. You don't mind, do you?) I could slip across and take a rest cure. It's an ideal spot for making music. I've rewritten three quarters of *Clair de Lune*, by the by, since I've been there, and it ought to be finished before the autumn. It's quite good—much better than when you heard it in town. But I shall be glad when it's done, I want to get on to new work, something more solid and intellectual, I've got the hang of it in my head, and if there's a decent piano here I'll play you some of the themes after dinner. Unless you would rather wait till we get to Évol? I've got a full concert grand up there, a ripping instrument, you'll love it."

"I am not—I am not coming with you to Évol!"

"Yes, you are," said Evelyn, taking her in his arms. "You are—you are coming with me to Évol." He kissed her. "Kitty, I've been a devil to you. I know that: I knew it at the time, only I couldn't help myself. I ought not to have married you then. But I'm going to marry you now, and you must forgive me for love's own sake and not because I deserve it. I can't even say I'm sorry. How can I, when I don't even now understand what was wrong? What on earth's the good of asking what's happened to me? How should I know? I only know you're safe with me and I shall never hurt you—in that way—again. In other ways, yes, perhaps, for I'm a careless ass and for my life I can't keep accounts. I still owe Blanc

seven hundred francs on the price of the furniture. But you must make the best job of me you can. You can't give me the chuck at this time of day when you've belonged to me ever since you wore a bib. Let you go to Meredith? I will see Meredith shot first. I'm a better man than Meredith. Come, you're mine, aren't you?" Kitty was silent.

Later that evening, when Meredith had faded to a shadow in Kitty's half compassionate, half scornful remembrance, she felt Evelyn start as if some thorn of memory had pricked him, and subdue a sigh. "What's the matter?" Kitty asked, touching his hand. Evelyn drew it away. "Eve, what is it?" said his wife, rallying her courage to bear the suffocating throb of her heart, while all the anguish of her early married life came flooding back over her like a winter sea. Did he shrink from her still?

"It isn't clean."

Kitty arched her eyebrows. "I should recommend washing it. That is a trouble that doesn't seem worth sighing over. I can lend you some soap if you haven't any."

"It won't come clean with soap."

"My poor child, what is wrong?"

"I told you."

This time light dawned and Kitty laughed—a little tender laugh, veiling infinite relief and happiness under mockery. "Are you fretting over that unfortunate moth? It would have died soon anyway; moths never live very long."

"Kitty, you mean to be consoling, I know, but the form of consolation isn't worthy of you. If it comes

to that, what are we all but moths? and we none of us live very long. Yet we go on hoping that no hand may shut on us and crush us. . . . No, it was cruel: and I hate cruelty."

"Was it cruel?" Kitty said, reluctantly conceding his point. "Perhaps." She drew him to her. "But be comforted: you never will do it again."

"And after all it's the way I should like to die myself," he raised his face to feel the night wind cool on it and to listen to the nightingales in the patio and the sharp cry of a hunting bat: "one moment your arms and all this world of music, and after that the dark."\*

THE END

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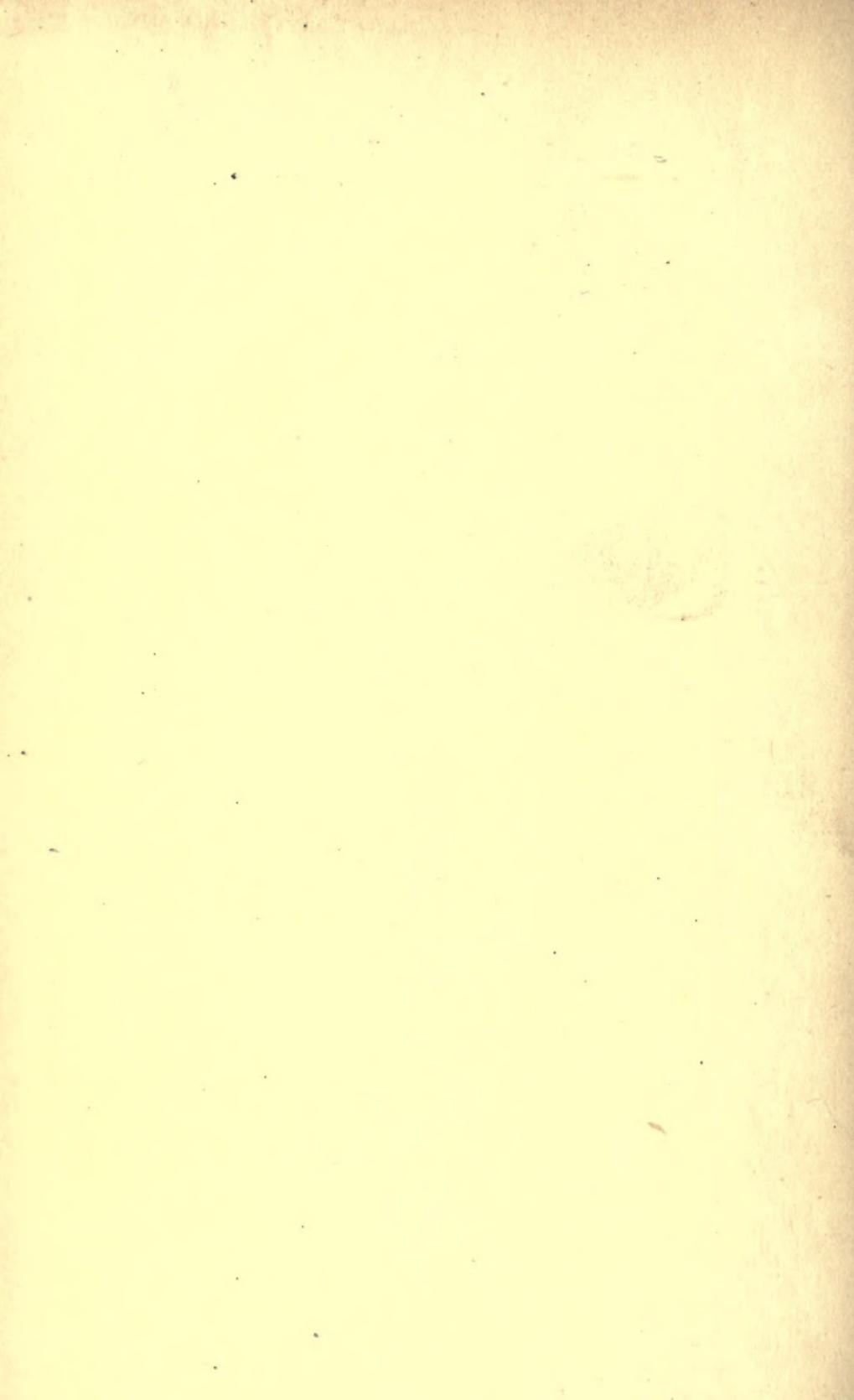












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